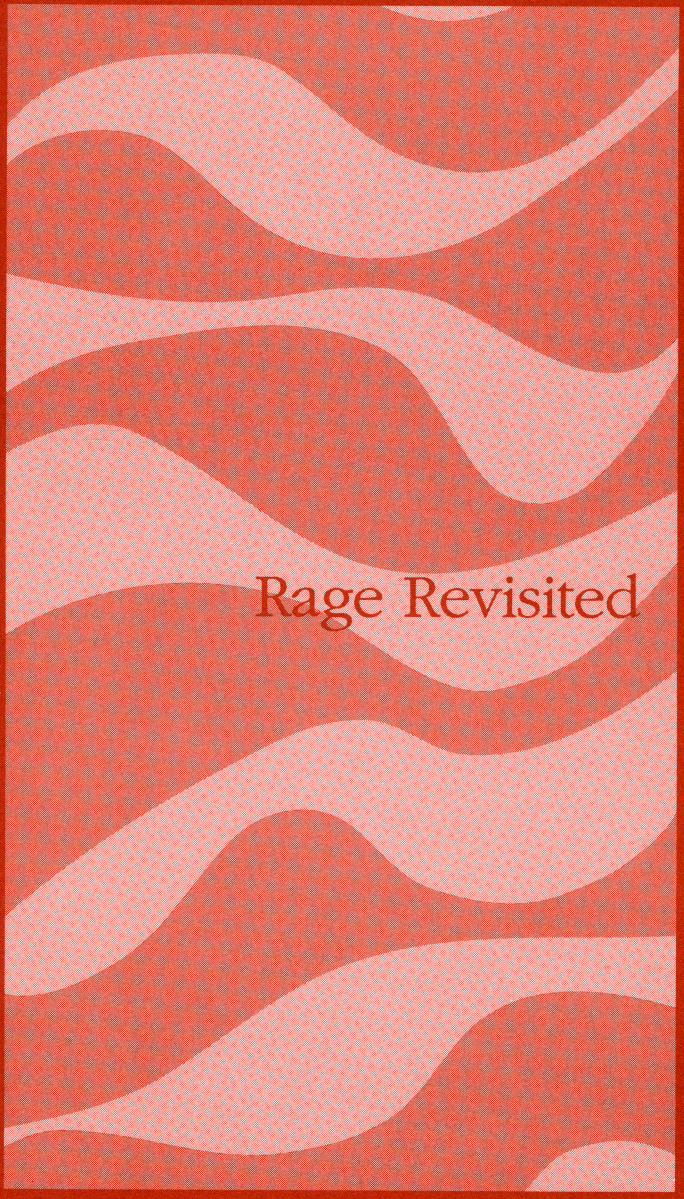
August 1997 Volume 24 Number 4



CURRENTS
in Theology and Mission

Currents

in Theology and Mission

Published by
Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago

in cooperation with
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Wartburg Theological Seminary

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CURRENTS IN THEOLOGY AND MISSION (ISSN: 0098-2113) is published bimonthly (every other month), February, April, June, August, October, December. Annual subscription rate: $15.00 in the U.S. and Canada ($18.00 overseas). Two-year rate: $29.00 in the U.S. and Canada ($35.00 overseas). Three-year rate: $42.00 in the U.S. and Canada ($51.00 overseas). Published by Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, a non-profit organization, 1100 East 55th Street, Chicago, Illinois 60615, to which all business correspondence is to be addressed. Printed in U.S.A.

CURRENTS is indexed in *Elenchus, IZBW, NTA, OTA, Religion Index I* (formerly *IRPL*), *Religious and Theological Abstracts*, and *Theologische Literaturzeitung*.

MICROFORM AVAILABILITY: 16mm microfilm, 35mm microfilm, 105mm microfiche, and article copies are available through University Microfilms Inc., 300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106.

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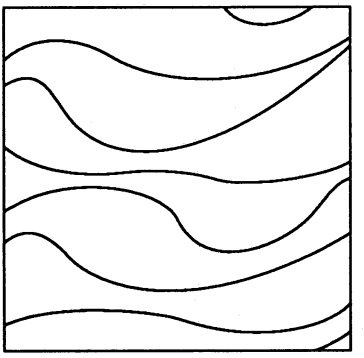
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Rage Revisited

I write this editorial as the jury is contemplating the fate of Timothy McVeigh, who was recently found guilty of perpetrating the worst act of domestic American terrorism. McVeigh's pathological response to perceived injustice should make us more sensitive than ever to the legitimate grievances felt by many in our society and should help us consider how the gospel might enable people to channel their anger into human and societal transformation or to process their pain in a way that will not let God or the Christian community step aside from the call for justice. The essays in this issue, written by members of the faculty of Wartburg Theological Seminary and edited by Professor Norma Cook Everist, revisit the questions of rage in our society and they also analyze other cultural encounters.

Roger W. Fjeld suggests what the church has to offer as we minister in the midst of rural discontent. "Rural" refers to family farms, but it also includes occupations like ranching, mining, forestry, and recreation. We must challenge the too-easy innocence on the part of those who feel they are being unjustly treated by economic and social forces. People engaged in righteous causes need to be reminded of their own unrighteousness. Despite widespread anti-institutionalism in our society, institutions are of crucial importance for achieving meaning and purpose in life, and the churches are the institutions best situated to offer direction to a culture in crisis. Institutions deserve to be trusted until they abuse that trust. If the church is to be a leaven in an endangered society, it needs to call people back to a responsibility for each other and for the created order.

L. Shannon Jung notes some of the current violence is a response to a second evil—systemic discrimination. There is some truth in the radical right's belief that the overclass sees young, white, blue-collar, rural males as a minority that is dumb, violent, and expendable. Since many rural people feel that the American dream they have pursued is a sham, rural churches ought to support advocacy groups and foster communities of moral deliberation that see justice as constitutive of the gospel. As churches, we offer an alternative way to confront the same injustices which give paramilitary groups a reason to exist.

Craig L. Nessan explores the religious rationale of the racist right, sometimes known as Christian Identity. Many of these groups hold that Jews are descendants of Eve and Satan and believe that the mixing of the races is original sin. Their racism extends to their Christology, imagining Jesus to be of the white race and taking as literally as possible his condemnations of the religious leaders of his day. They fear that Jews have a massive conspiracy to destroy the white race and identify degeneracy in such phenomena as interracial marriage, gay rights, feminism, and gun control. They expect to pass through a coming tribulation and anticipate battle with the "Zionist Occupational Government." There are cultural, economic, and religious explanations for the rise of these radical groups, and they take root exactly where individuals are angry and threatened, or feel like they have lost their voice. Responding to Christian Identity and related developments provides the church with an occasion to redouble its efforts in education, advocacy, and constructive theology.

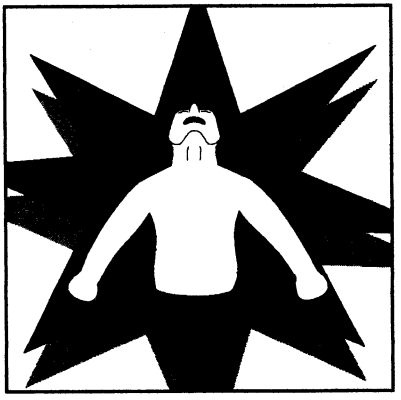
Norma Cook Everist takes the burning of the Black churches as an opportunity to explore the inadequate ecclesiology of American Civil Religion and the various stratagems used to defuse or deny the reality of the church burnings. A double crime lies at the beginning of American history: what to do with the people who were already here and how to understand and relate to people brought here against their will in slave ships. America has denied it needed a redeemer while it has striven to be a redeemer nation to the world. Paradoxically, the lack of inclusion in the ecclesiology of the civil faith both oppressed African Americans and allowed them to carry their own creedal convictions into the public arenas. If we are to affirm civil religion at all, it must have an inclusive ecclesiology which values the particularities of faith communities. All of us need to help rebuild the Black churches and press for more vigorous investigation of the acts of arson that set them ablaze.

Alberto Pereyra discusses the social implications of the phenomena associated with the Virgin of Guadalupe. While there are connections between Aztec deities and the piety associated with Mary and Christ in Mexico, the center of Guadalupe's attention was not the splendor of the Spanish plans, but the poverty and misery of those who live on the periphery of society. The cultural clash of sixteenth-century Spain and Mexico was resolved in the brown Lady of Guadalupe. Still before us is the challenge to welcome, learn from, and incorporate Indian spirituality.

Ralph W. Quere believes that Johann Sebastian Bach presents a paradigm for modern communication of the gospel through music. The Western liturgy has evangelistic power precisely because of the Word its words bear. Church

musicians need to be more willing to compromise on tunes while maintaining the integrity of the texts. He finds a new evangelistic model in the recent Lukan-musical, "Most Excellent Theophilus," which makes Jesus' "mission statement" in Nazareth the criterion for the events selected from Luke's gospel. Reflecting on the music and words of Bach's passions can give us criteria for evaluating and producing contemporary musical presentations of the gospel.

We are all tempted to defuse rage by circumscribing it or by blindness to the issues to which it responds. Revisiting rage allows us to identify the peculiarities of a Timothy McVeigh, but it also forces us to eschew reconciliation that is too quick or too easy. Anger may be a proper response to the brutalities of modern life, but anger may also reflect self-righteousness or a perverse projection of anxieties onto others. Revisiting rage requires us to take it with ultimate seriousness and respond to its causes with strategies aimed at radical transformation.



Listen to the cries of the outraged:
"Feel our pain!"
"Don't just stand there; do something."

Yours, for revisiting,

Ralph W. Klein
Editor

Ministering in the Midst of Rural Discontent

Roger W. Fjeld
President and Professor of Church History
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Rural America is in the midst of a season of discontent. Across the land significant numbers of rural people feel burdened, misunderstood, and sometimes exploited and bitter. Some are angry and some are moved to violence. Extreme cases—the Freemen in Montana, for example—make national news, and sometimes that is all the rest of America sees or understands about rural discontent.

The great jurist, Oliver Wendell Holmes, noted that "extreme cases make bad law." In a similar sense, vigilantes and militia groups are the extreme groups that block a better understanding of the more moderate, serious realities in rural America today. Those realities deserve to be explored in settings that promote reasoned discourse and broad perspective.

The church can help create such settings and contribute to the dialogue. The church is not expert in many of the rural issues and needs to avoid claiming more expertise than it has. But we know something about removing the barriers to reasoned discourse and about broadening perspectives. In what follows, I want to suggest what we have to offer as we minister in the midst of rural discontent. At the same time it is important to affirm that discontent does not define rural America today; it simply describes a dynamic that grips some people as they struggle with a variety of issues.

The many faces of rural America

One of the barriers to helpful discourse is the narrowness of conceptions of "rural." I was born and raised on an Iowa farm, and there is indelibly etched in my mind a clear conception of what rural means. But there are other, quite different and equally rural realities—ranching, mining, forestry, and recreation, to name a few. And beyond that, there is a growing return to rural America by people who are not coming to work the land or natural resources, but who welcome what rural life has to offer. All of them have a stake in exploring rural issues, and all are potential allies to each other in addressing those issues.

The church is both local and national; it knows and serves in all sorts of rural settings. We have the capability to link various segments of rural population and rural economics into larger dialogues about matters

of common concern. We can encourage people to think more broadly about those matters. We can challenge them to include the many faces of rural America in their thinking.

What goes around doesn't quite come around

Another barrier to broad-minded, reasoned discourse is ignorance about earlier seasons of discontent in rural America. Too often the focus of discussion is so narrowly on the present that it cannot benefit from what has gone before. Today's issues are neither the first nor the worst that rural Americans have faced. People who want to do something about present problems need to have some sense of the problems faced by previous generations and about the solutions that were attempted in relation to those problems.

There have been repeated crises in rural America. Some related to nature—drought, blight, pestilence. Others related to human activities—overproduction, transportation and marketing monopolies, shortage of credit. Those stories are readily available and deserve to be studied to see what other generations faced and what they did about their concerns.[1]

At the same time it is clear that issues and problems never repeat themselves in pure form. What goes around doesn't quite come around. Neither the problems nor the proposed solutions replicate from one period to another. So there are clues from the past, but no clear answers. The 1996 farm bill, for example, phases out subsidies and production quotas over five years. Historically, uncontrolled production has triggered two of the worst rural agricultural crises, in the 1880s and 90s and again in the Great Depression. But now we produce for a world market, with overseas purchasing power as a key issue. The circumstances are similar enough to be worrisome and different enough to hold promise.

The church has always believed that an understanding of history is important for the present. Too often we have limited that to church history. We need to care about a broader historical horizon and encourage our members to explore those antecedents to our present realities. At the same time we are learning, as church and society, not to trust history too much. It is increasingly clear that written history has the character of evidence rather than simple fact. It is evidence in the sense that values often dictate what was judged important at a given time, what was considered worth remembering as that time passed, and what we consider worth recovering as usable for the present and future. In extreme cases, there is deliberate reduction of history to propaganda for or against some group or cause. There have been times when that has happened in relation to rural issues, but more often the distortions in our remembering are the result of focusing too narrowly and welcoming supporting evidence too uncritically.

Human nature in question

Another barrier to reasoned discourse is the tendency of rural partisans to understand themselves in entirely too innocent terms. Most rural Americans are Christians or at least perceive themselves as standing in the American religious tradition. As such, they are conscious of the reality of sin and most are willing to confess their sinfulness, though

[1] I find two surveys especially helpful: Robert C. McMath, Jr., *American Populism* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993); Richard Hofstadter, *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955).

often not at so basic a level as "by nature sinful and unclean." Americans of most religious persuasions have long since moved to a much more shallow understanding of personal sinfulness.

When such people see themselves as victims of injustice and enlist in a cause seeking to right the wrong, it is easy for them to think of themselves as righteous. In relation to the injustices, they may be right. But too often that sense of righteousness is generalized, so that partisans no longer reflect on their own contributions to a broken world. There is something about causes and movements that tempts members to feel independently righteous. Suddenly sin—greed, selfishness, violence, exploitation, etc.—describes others, but not ourselves.

This denial of personal and group brokenness is endemic in the American experience. David Noble, in *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden*,[2] says that Americans, to the extent we identify with Adam and Eve, identify with them before the Fall, not after. That is, we may be naive and do mistaken things, but we and our kind are relatively innocent.

Rural Americans are no exception. In fact, they are doubly vulnerable because, in the value system of the founders of the American nation, the yeoman farmer was the ideal citizen. That yeoman farmer was a man who, with just his wife and children, carved out a nearly independent living from the land and never sought to be anything but a solitary farmer. In that form, it was mythic from the beginning—a kernel of fact embellished to provide an ideal. In fact, the typical immigrant farmer or rancher or logger came here both to escape old-world restraints and to "get ahead." Thus the yeoman was a capitalist from the word go and engaged in the universal human broken condition, while nurturing a relatively innocent self-image.



If that illustration is too dated, look at the rural crisis of the 1980s in relation to the discontent of the 1990s. Today one substantial complaint is the growing monopoly exercised by grain companies and meat packers. It is a serious issue, not unlike the transportation monopoly exercised by railroads in the 1870s-1890s; the era Mark Twain dubbed "The Gilded Age." The danger of a market controlled by processors at the expense of both producers and consumers is real and the stakes are high. But some of those who, in the 1990s, cry out against big corporations, had little compunction, in the 1980s, about buying up the farms of their hapless neighbors. So the image of the family farm is invoked by people who wiped out lots of family farms!

The point is that people engaged in righteous causes need to be reminded of their own unrighteousness. Seldom do religious people in such causes acknowledge their own sinfulness. The church needs to call them to account, even as they call their oppressors to account. Otherwise rural

[2] David W. Noble, *The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden* (New York: Grosset and Dunlap, 1971).

> If the church is to be a leaven in an endangered society, it needs to call people back to a responsibility for each other and for the created order.

people will go on simplifying the problems they face and proposing unrealistic or unachievable solutions.

Rural people are not going to welcome that sort of message any more than people in any other segment of the population. But it is an essential Word that needs to be spoken into the dialogue, if that dialogue is to be useful. It will have to be a biblical Word, because anything less than that will not be persuasive.

Learning to live in and through institutions

It is an American trait to distrust institutions, especially large and distant ones. The earliest immigrants from Europe came, in part, to escape the claims of the powerful institutions—the government or the military or the church. The Declaration of Independence pits individual liberty against the encroachments of foreign governments. The Civil War was, at least in part, a protest against federal control over state and local governmental units. The rural protests noted earlier—against Eastern banking interests and against railroads—were protests against institutions, not just businesses. The political campaigns of 1994 and 1996 made major issues out of the size and activities of the federal government.

The same issue crops up in the life of the churches in America. From the beginning, there has been a preference for "church" to be conceived in purely local and congregational terms. Out of European experience (but also out of bias) there has been a suspicion of church at any wider scale. Bishops and popes have been especially suspect, but so have what we now call judicatories. Seminaries have sometimes been suspect, because their graduates were seen as people who unnecessarily complicated theology and church life for self-serving ends. In fact, revivalism in America has thrived on the suspicion that religion is really much simpler than we have led people to believe.

In the ELCA we have seen this sort of anti-institutionalism in a number of ways. There has been a feeling that the church-wide structure is too large and too dictatorial (when, in fact, it is a significantly smaller staff than the staffs of the antecedent churches and works in a quite collegial way). When people call it "Higgins Road" that is not a compliment; it is an oblique criticism of a structure that feels alien to people who are prone to feeling alienated from large institutions. And reference to "bishops" often invokes images of arbitrary power when, in fact, our bishops have more responsibility than they have power. Anti-institutional sentiment has that power to distort reality and undermine the legitimate functions of institutions.

Robert Bellah and his co-authors have written in defense of institutions. In *The Good Society* they argue that institutions are essential to the good life; that Americans should be building up their institutions

rather than trying to escape them. They note that "it is much harder to build trust than to lose it. But that is our problem in the United States: we have begun to lose trust in our institutions."[3] The search for individual meaning and satisfaction is doomed from the outset, they argue, because it is precisely in and through institutions that we find frameworks for meaning and satisfaction in life.

None of this is meant to be a panacea for institutions. All of them, including the organized church, are prone to misuse their mandates. Even as we need to invest in our institutions, we need to hold them closely accountable for their stewardship. But institutions deserve to be trusted until they abuse that trust and deserve to be restored to trust, not destroyed in the name of "cleansing." What we need to combat is the knee-jerk reaction to any attempts by institutions to exercise their obligations to us and for us.

We can contribute significantly to that recovery of belief in the usefulness of institutions if we are willing to offer a better understanding of the church than "the gathering of the like-minded." Too often church life becomes an exercise in individualism, from individual conversions to a solitary sense at the altar to private needs privately expressed. We need to recover the power and identity that is ours because we are the Body of Christ in and for the world. In that model, unanimity is not necessary and the only like-mindedness that is required is "have this mind among yourselves, which you have in Christ Jesus..." (Phil 2:5).

The development of a pro-institutional posture rather than an anti-institutional one is no easy matter. The predisposition to distrust what is large and distant is so pronounced that holders of that disposition are easily angered when they are challenged to re-examine their attitudes. It takes both skill and courage to build a positive understanding of church as Body of Christ. That model becomes a call to discipleship and to stewardship, at a time when people are more inclined to independence and the needs of the self. But if the church is to be a leaven in an endangered society, it needs to call people back to a responsibility for each other and for the created order.

The call to be stewards of life

The call to stewardship, in fact, will be one of the distinguishing marks of the church, if we are faithful to our calling in the years that lie ahead. Ours is a culture that has become self-directed and self-indulgent to a dangerous degree. People in all segments of the population are inclined to honor their own immediate needs and to be blind to the claims others have on them. An old Quaker proverb says, "We do not inherit the land from our parents, we borrow it from our children," and therefore we have responsibility to return what we have borrowed in as good or better shape than when we borrowed it. That case can easily be broadened to include the whole moral and spiritual universe, not just the land.

It has become fashionable to decry the self-indulgence of the younger generations of Americans. The tendency by critics is to call people to be more disciplined in their lives; to work harder and save more and control their behavior. While that may be true, it is a shallow response to a much larger issue—what people understand as meaning and purpose in life. The earlier book by Robert Bellah and his co-authors documented a troubling fact of American life. *Habits of the Heart* describes a tendency on the part of Americans to measure

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[3] Robert Bellah, et al, *The Good Society* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1991).

life in purely personal and relative ways, denying any permanent or transcendent claims on them. It also describes how often such people are surprised at how empty their lives are. Those who succeed in their quest for independence are less satisfied than those who are enmeshed in a web of relationships and obligations to family, work, and community.[4] One hears an echo, there, of the biblical assertion, "Those who find their life will lose it, and those who lose their life for my sake will find it" (Mt 10: 39).

We can offer a dose of theological reality into laments about American life, including rural life, by reminding each other that we are not our own, we were made for a purpose and bought with a price. Our lives are not our own to dispose of as we see fit; they are gifts from God for the common good, and it is time to recall us to a commitment to that common good. These are the sorts of things that are regularly given lip-service in the thinking of Christians, but it is time to drive the matter home before it is too late—before we lose the remaining glue that holds American society together.

Rural America has a great deal to offer the rest of America and a hungry, needy world. Those who live and work on farms and in forests and mines deserve the respect of those who benefit from their labors. Theirs is an essential role in service to the common good. It is high time we move toward common purpose in service to each other and in obedience to the One who is Lord of all.

What, then, does the rural church have to offer, as it seeks to minister in the midst of rural discontent? As noted earlier, it can offer a broader sense of what is rural, it can learn and share some of the history of other periods of discontent, it can challenge too-easy innocence on the part of those who feel they are being unjustly treated by other economic and social forces in American society, and it can invite people to understand the crucial importance of institutions for meaning and purpose in life.

The rural church can also understand that it has the potential to stand in a unique relationship to community and culture. In *The Good Society* the authors argue that the churches are the institutions best situated to offer coherence and direction to a culture in crisis. The churches should be able to transcend the culture in order to see what others do not see and at the same time to embrace the culture on behalf of God who cares for and redeems the fallen world.

The danger, as we minister in the midst of rural discontent, is that we settle for being just one more discontented voice—an echo of the crisis rather than a beacon pointing beyond the moment and the besetting issues to our common calling as believers and stewards. If the church can transcend the moment, so will its people be able to see that larger picture, and if the church can embrace the world as an instrument of God's purposes, so will its people understand better their calling in life.

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[4] Robert Bellah, et al, *Habits of the Heart, Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

Rural Rage: Lessons from the Oklahoma City Bombing

L. Shannon Jung
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The Freemen in Jordan, Montana, and the Unabomber brought militias back to our attention. They are part of a wider issue: rural rage. The rage of rural Americans connects the events associated with Jordan, Waco, Ruby Ridge, and Oklahoma City. That rage is most evident in a group that can be seen as a new minority: young, blue collar, white, rural men. The Oklahoma City bombing, in particular, points to a pervasive sense of disenfranchisement and the suspicion among rural peoples that they are simply not represented in the public sector; their voices are stifled. They certainly feel that the government ignores their pain, and often that the church does also.[1]

This article will argue that the evil of violence can be understood as a response to a "second evil," the evil of systemic discrimination, which rural people experience. By describing this evil from the perspective of rural Americans and trying to understand the reasons for their anger, the article seeks to open a discussion about how Christian churches might resist that evil and work for justice.

Rural peoples, long held to be the most patriotic and supportive of the nation, don't think the government cares about their problems or them. A surprising 82% believe that "most public officials are not really interested in the problems of the average man," as compared to 75% of all Americans (*NYTimes* survey, 8/27/95).

Their feelings have a basis in reality:

The long-term tilt of U.S. farm policy away from the medium-sized producer and the absence of policies directed at rural development in the U.S. are well known. Less obvious, emerging injustices are starkly visible to all rural people; the most powerful one—a gradual but steady loss in their standard of living—is one that is spreading nationally to all but the wealthiest 20%, the so-called overclass. This is a nationwide phenomenon, but has significant impact on

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[1] Catherine McNicol Stock links the Oklahoma City event with a long tradition of agricultural revolt in a new book, *Rural Radicals: Righteous Rage in the American Grain* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1996).

rural peoples who frequently supplement farm incomes with or otherwise depend on low-benefit, minimum wage, working-class jobs.

Events in 1995 and 1996 exacerbated the sense of rising inequity: labor disputes; lawsuits threatened or brought against major corporate packing plants and corporations—e.g., ADM; and sellouts connected with the meat packing industry, especially hog and pork production. The degree of rural poverty was rising again. Not only is the rate of rural poverty higher than that of urban residents, the situation for rural children is comparatively worse off as well. With anticipated cuts in welfare, farm programs, health insurance, and other social programs, rural poverty will almost certainly escalate.[2] There are grounds to support the suspicion that the deck has been stacked against blue-collar working people; much of this activity seems designed to keep wages low.[3] There is some evidence to support the notion of collusion among the top buyers and packers in food supply industries.

Such events as the Oklahoma City bombing cannot be seen as occasional nor explained only by reference to rural locations; it is important to uncover their roots. The rise of paramilitary and Christian radical right groups has found fertile soil in rural America, and especially among those who are feeling disenfranchised. What does this mean? The decisions of trial juries will not go far toward helping us examine the underlying causes of this behavior. The danger is that an element of scapegoating may seduce the church as well as other U.S. institutions and citizens into seeing such cases as limited in meaning to the activity of a few individuals.

This phenomenon may be surfacing most obviously with one particular rural group. Young, rural, blue-collar, white males have less to lose than their older rural counterparts. They have less to start with; their futures seem even more uncertain. They have grown up in an historical period when the government's legitimacy was always in question. They have been susceptible to those ideologies and groups who seem to offer them some control over their future. They feel discriminated against, and indeed there is enough reality there to support such a hypothesis.

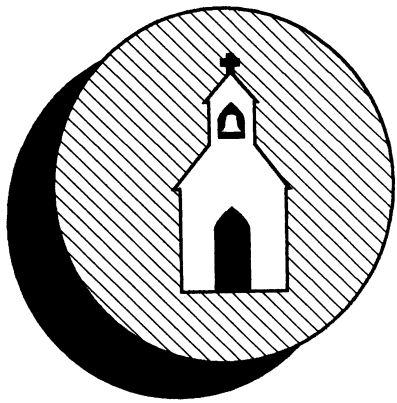
There is a great deal to be learned in thinking of the Oklahoma City bombing as a signal of a pervasive sense of injustice among rural people. The bombing may have been an attempt to gain control, to get governmental attention, to say no to disenfranchisement. As such, the act may be the pathway into understanding the nature of evil. By understanding rural frustration and the quiet, desperate rage of those who are powerless to preserve their land or values, we may be able to see the event as indicative

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[2] See the Statistics in *Rural Conditions and Trends*, Economic Research Service, United States Department of Agriculture, Fall 1993, pp. 46-53.

[3] One phenomenon, widespread in its rural impact, is especially illustrative: the employment of large numbers of immigrant peoples. Meat-packing plants, produce-harvesting farm sectors (grapes, tomatoes, lettuce, sugar beets, etc.), and low-wage service jobs—all are rural industries which are employing immigrant peoples, often to the detriment of long-term local residents. George J. Borgas summarizes the impact of "The New Economics of Immigration," *Atlantic Monthly*, November 1966: "Current immigration redistributes wealth from unskilled workers, whose wages are lowered by immigrants, to skilled workers and owners of companies that buy immigrants' services, and from taxpayers who bear the burden of paying for the social services used by immigrants to consumers who use the goods and services produced by immigrants" (p. 80, *passim*).

of a carcinogen whose growth became visible in Oklahoma City. Rural people have lost the sense that they have a place, the sense that they exercise any power. Something has fallen off the shelf. The action goes far beyond a mere disdain for the federal government; rather the federal government has been identified as the oppressor in order to explain the depth of what this group feels has happened to them.



What is the nature of the evil at work?

It would be a mistake to see the actions in Oklahoma City as involving only one kind of evil: the violent and heinous murder was deliberately timed to kill people and not only make a symbolic statement. The evil was premeditated, stark, brutal, monstrous. At the same time the roots of that event may uncover another evil, far less obvious, whose perpetuators are far harder to find culpable. In the end the second evil is more powerful and more potentially explosive than the first. Even when only a small number of people participate in an act of overt violence, that act may be the outgrowth of underlying conditions which are affecting any number of other, especially rural, people. This evil is pernicious precisely because those who are perpetuating it do not recognize that it is evil; indeed, it appears to be well-intentioned. For example, legislators who create farm policy whose effects they do not understand may think that they are benefiting the commonwealth or even farmers when in fact their laws are creating enormous psychic and economic pressure. This evil masquerades as good; it majors in self-deception.

Rural people experience this evil. The second wave of reaction in rural America to the news of the bombing—after the initial anger and belief that Palestinians had done it, and then shock that Americans could have—was that it was understandable; rural people comprehend the popularity of the militia and the temptation to despair of the political process, even as they decry the actions of perpetrators. Perhaps, however, it was only rural Americans who did profoundly understand the intensity of the anger that erupted in Oklahoma City. Media interviewers seldom seek out their voices.

Understanding the second evil is significant for rural pastors, as well as for the larger church. After all, Christians are not immune to cultural forces; people in Christian congregations—and even their pastors—are affected in ways beyond their conscious desire or control. Moreover the nature of the second evil is that it is not only external, it creeps into our souls and begins its subtle work of self-deception there. Injustices are not only external threats; as they infiltrate our consciousness, they begin to corrupt our ability to distinguish good from evil. The issue is complicity. The culture tempts Christians to identify what is legal—even if it is unjust—with what is Christian. Part of the destructiveness of the second evil resides in the hopelessness it generates, its capacity to dissolve a person's self-con-

trol. On this level, the actions of hate groups and perpetrators are representative of impulses that are boiling in the countryside.

There is a contrast between the premeditated nature of the evil of the bombing and the insidious, disguised, slowly creeping evil of the erosion of people's quality of life. One is a manifest evil; the other is latent. One is clearly perpetuated by identifiable agents; the other evil is perpetuated through institutional, legitimate systems and millions of agents. The first is an event; the second so much a part of the fabric of societal organization that those of us who are ideologically opposed to it nevertheless transmit it. The second evil is systemic discrimination that gradually destroys the lives and distorts the perspectives of rural peoples. The public signs of this are the economic disadvantage of rural people and the way they have been culturally stigmatized.

Calling this second evil "systemic discrimination" suggests that it is not premeditated by any particular group.[4] It is not oppression in that no one planned or intended it. One clear example is the ease with which money can now be electronically transmitted around the world. That has decoupled local bankers' accountability and their investment in the local community. Though unintended, this evil is clearly corrosive. It snuffs out life by degrees. The power of subtle, routine, officially legitimate conditions disenfranchises lower-income people and contributes to the loss of family life because this evil is integral to the strategies recommended for negotiating contemporary life. Its power resides precisely in its normality, its acceptance as routine—e.g., the terms on which loans are made or the process of credentialing for well-paid positions. The everyday nature of oppression blinds us to its being pernicious—indeed sinful.

This second kind of evil is one that implicates middle-class members of mainline churches. They eschew violence in the name of Christ but cannot at the same time understand the formative destruction that accompanies working class and poverty class people's daily grind. Many middle class Americans cannot shake off the feeling, not just the thought, that they are also caught in the web and their fortune is connected to others' misfortune— through the tax laws, the Social Security system, or the status they inherited. Bluntly put, there is some truth in the radical right's belief that the overclass sees young, white, blue-collar, rural males as a minority that is dumb, violent, and expendable. The middle or upper class are implicated in the bombing. That this act was "homegrown"—that is, an event that had roots in U.S. soil—was initially a shock, unbelievable. Christians are called to locate the roots of the event and to confront injustices that, however much or partially, precipitated it.

It is all-too-human to avoid, even unconsciously, one's own stake in others' condition. Facing complicity can happen when one understands what the rage of rural peoples is about. Then one can ask whether they have any stake, any share, in the event in Oklahoma City. This second evil works with self-deception and not-quite-conscious avoidance and denial; it twists its way into one's soul. It requires a powerful community to face the way systemic discrimination affects those practicing discrimination and not only those who experience the force of

[4] See David C. Korten, *When Corporations Rule the World* (West Hartford and San Francisco: Kumarian Press and Berret-Koehler Publishers, 1995). Korten argues that the logic of dominant corporations' mode of operation renders their effects unpremeditated (in essence computers, not men and women, make the investment decisions).

subjugation. The church can be such a community.

Indeed, as Will Campbell or Reinhold Niebuhr would remind us, part of the Christian heritage is that we are free to be reconciled with our enemies.[5] Campbell never tired of reminding us to apply Jesus' adage "to love our enemies" to the Ku Klux Klan. To be sure, part of the work of love may be anger and judgment. Reconciliation that is based on fuzziness or willful neglect of questions of right and wrong is not true reconciliation. Jesus did say, "Go and sin no more." A self-righteousness born of trying to avoid complicity may blind one to the complexity and ambiguity of the motives of those committing hate crimes. Christians can at the least entertain the possibility of there being some realistic, even legitimate, origin of paramilitary and radical right Christian rage. There may be some truth there that those who believe in the one who called himself "the Truth" can consider. The church needs to understand these dynamics in order to try to avoid both self-righteousness and further complicity.

How is the second evil widening?

The dynamics in rural culture that might have contributed to the bombing are not hard to find. They are not unique to rural America, but they have a distinctive face in the countryside. There is a smoldering anger among rural people who feel that the American dream they have pursued was a sham. Those values of hard work, independence, freedom of decision-making, and faith in the system have not "paid off." There is frustration and anger when the values and beliefs rural peoples have trusted betray them.

There is a hostile dependency in rural America. The dependence of farmers' income on federal farm policy and tax arrangements creates a rage against those who thereby control and influence farm practices. Furthermore, it appears that, having created a dependency on subsidies, the grounds of the farm economy are now being shifted towards a market economy again and away from supports. The phenomenon of hostile dependency, not unknown in adolescence, has a parallel in what Garry Wills calls "constitutional anti-governmentalism."[6] The authority of government is being challenged from the ground up. There is a crisis of legitimacy that is spreading to other institutions, like business and the church. Wills points to a "delegitimatizing" process which has been at work for some decades now and notes eleven areas the militias and other right-wing groups are

> The everyday nature of oppression blinds us to its being pernicious—indeed sinful.

[5] See e.g., Reinhold Niebuhr, *Love & Justice*, ed. D. B. Robertson (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1957), 218-31, and Will Campbell edited the journal *Katallagete: Be Reconciled* from 1965 to 1989; for a brief overview of his work, see Perry H. Biddle, Jr., "Of Alms and a Man Who Sings: The Life and Times of Will C. Campbell," *Sojourners* 22:40-41, 43, May 1993, and Jan Nunley, "Evangelizing the Klan: Responding to Rage on the Right," *The Witness* 75:8-11, December 1992.

[6] Gary Wills, "The New Revolutionaries," *New York Review of Books*, August 10, 1995, 50-55.

identifying as evidence of the illegitimacy of federal acts: taxation, the jury system, regulations, police power, schools, family, religion, citizen militias, constitutionalism, corruption, and guns. What is striking about this list is not its deviance from blue collar or even middle class complaints but its proximity to complaints about loss of freedom, powerlessness, and pressures to accept lower standards of living. In short, the crisis of legitimacy has to do with not feeling valued, which underlies and reinforces systemic discrimination.

In many ways rural, blue collar men are at the front of a national trend. "U.S. wages are at their lowest point in 20 years and declining," according to Lori Walach, director of Public Citizen's Global Trade Watch. Lester Thurow reports that median real wages for all full-time male workers have fallen some $3600 in the last two decades. A majority of American workers have suffered real wage reductions while the per capita domestic product was rising.[7]

Not every law or regulation affecting rural and working folks is illegitimate. Farmers and other small business owners, however, have little voice in setting rules and limitations that control their work. For example, national policies support "cheap" food and low prices for agricultural products. Small businesses have to meet wages, sanitation, and working condition guidelines. These people also feel discriminated against by the injustice of having to meet regulations without receiving just compensation either for that or for their risk-taking. While many of these elements affect rural people, virtually all of them seem to come down on one particular group: white males with working class incomes. Many are angry about the injustice of having to subsidize the federal government's cheap food policy or clean water and air policies out of their incomes. They think the burdens associated with these goals should be distributed more fairly—for example, through higher prices for their product or a different inheritance process.

Exacerbating or at least accompanying that anger and frustration is a growing sense of powerlessness and loss of control. Farm families, on average, realize only 17% of their income from farm sources; they depend on factory or service or other jobs for the remaining 83%. When George Bush and Bill Clinton pressed for free trade agreements they encouraged the local factories and service industries of rural America to relocate to the *maquiladoras* of the Mexican-American border or to the Philippines. Those other jobs that farmers had depended on were terminated. New ones emerging in the countryside are taken over by recent immigrants. Too often these rural people feel no one listens—not his or her government, neighbor, pastor, not even God. The sense of powerlessness and loss of control in a very few cases deepens into paranoia and the fear that someone "has it in for them." In reality there are just enough grounds for those feelings so that they sometimes simmer into plausibility, especially if such feelings are shared by a peer group.

How can the church resist evil and promote love of neighbor?

It is important for church and civic groups to understand the rage and powerlessness of rural peoples. That rage is deeply grounded. It may erupt into other terrorist acts, and is, in part, the product of injustices. The sources of that rage and hostility—systemic discrimination—flourish in urban and even

[7] See Lester C. Thurow, "Companies Merge: Families Break Up," *New York Times*, Sunday, September 3, 1996, Op-Ed p. 13.

older suburban neighborhoods as well. Where should people experiencing destabilization place their hope? When false religions—the American dream of success, the effectiveness of violent reaction, the hope of insulating ourselves from others and depending on our own capacities—fall flat, where is the gospel? What does the church have to offer?

Extremists offer false hope to people who are desperate for it. We in the church know that only God is a dependable source of hope. This is a mandate, a challenge for groups like the Town and Country Alliance for Ministry, a congregationally-based community organizing group in rural Jones, Clinton, Scott, and Jackson counties, Iowa. Its co-director, Mary Farwell, hit the nail on the head when she told me that what is happening in rural culture is a call for church groups "to confront the system that is denying hope to rural people. There has to be an alternative to extremist groups. We do not offer quick or easy solutions, but we do question a system that doesn't respond to people or give them hope." Rural churches can support advocacy groups and foster communities of moral deliberation who see justice as constitutive of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Churches are important. They can provide a community of support and some reality-checks which help people evaluate paranoid attitudes and avoid desperate solutions. Some rural people believe they have no one to turn to. If this is the case, extremist groups quickly supply their own uncritical analysis and enemies' list which appears to make sense of the situation. If the church does not provide a "sacred canopy" which makes sense of the person's experience and helps them confront injustices, another group will. If the church ceases to embody a transcendent perspective which deflates paranoia and yet also identifies injustices, then the church has capitulated to the religions of the culture and the groups which support them.

Judy Heffernan, Director of the Methodist Town and Country Heartland Network, says that "In this climate some people may feel as though they have nothing to lose. I am afraid that if the church fails to recognize that there are some good reasons why people are angry, we may deny them a voice and unwittingly push them into a corner. Though nothing can condone the tragedy in Oklahoma City, the church needs to understand the injustices in the system that can push people to extremes. Certainly Jesus did not always side with respectable people."

There is here a clear call for rural churches, many of whom can understand the feeling of being unheard, to counteract, however possible, the elements of hopelessness and despair that exist in their communities. Many rural churches have come to terms with their own anger and despair and have dealt constructively with the challenge of what at least appears to be neglect on the part of denominational as well as other structures. They have learned to live out the gospel of Jesus Christ by reflecting the worth of every person to God. Those churches inspire the rest of the church by demonstrating what it means to be the body of Christ which exists for the sake of the world, empowered by the Spirit. They are communities of care and hope which offer an alternative to paramilitary groups which use apocalyptic Scripture to portray themselves as God's agents. As churches, we offer an alternative way to confront the same injustices which give paramilitary groups a *raison d' etre*. By being alert to our own economic and class bias, we can begin to become alert to homegrown injustices and the systemic evil embedded in law and policy.

From Waco to Oklahoma City to Your Backyard: Religious Rationale and the Racist Right

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Headlines draw our attention to the volatile mixture of extremist religion and extremist violence: David Koresh and the Branch Davidians at Waco, militia movements after the bombing at Oklahoma City, the trial and conviction of Timothy McVeigh at Denver, the militancy of the Freemen in Montana, and the "seccession" of the "Republic of Texas" from the United States. The tragic burning of the Branch Davidian buildings at Waco, Texas on April 19, 1993, claiming the lives of 74 persons in addition to those lives lost in the initial raid on February 28, has had many consequences. Critical voices have been raised against the role played by the government in proceeding according to a "hostage rescue" scenario rather than taking seriously the religious motives of David Koresh and those who followed him.[1] To dismiss Koresh as "the wacko from Waco" and his message as "Bible babble" was to fail to grasp how religious beliefs are at the heart of this movement and to misjudge how a peaceful settlement might have been possible. Serious engagement with the apocalyptic religious beliefs of the Branch Davidians, although they stand in striking similarity with much popular religion in America, has been noticeably absent.[2]

More ominous than these scholarly criticisms of the Branch Davidian debacle are those voices emanating from what Michael Barkun calls "the racist right."[3] It is prob-

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[1] James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco? Cults and the Battle for Religious Freedom in America* (Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1995) and Stuart A. Wright, *Armageddon in Waco: Critical Perspectives on the Branch Davidian Conflict* (Chicago: U. of Chicago Press, 1995).

[2] Craig L. Nessan, "When Faith Turns Fatal: David Koresh and Tragic Misreadings of Revelation," *Currents in Theology and Mission* 22 (June 1995): 191-99.

[3] Michael Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right: The Origins of the Christian Identity Movement* (Chapel Hill: U. of North Carolina Press, 1994).

ably no coincidence that the Oklahoma City bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building occurred on April 19, 1995, the two year anniversary of the inferno at Waco. With the smoke from the embers of the Branch Davidian buildings arose an alarm that sounded far and wide among paramilitary, "patriot," and far-right religious groups. Computer networks, fax networks, audiotapes, videotapes, and printed material all resounded with the warning that such government intrusion and interference with the right to bear and keep arms was also imminent against their own groups. The rhetoric from *Soldier of Fortune* magazine is not atypical:

> The fuse on the Waco disaster was lit by the knuckle-dragging pariah of pistol-packing feds, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco & Firearms (ATF). The ATF alleges a laundry list of legal violations by cult members, some over which the ATF even has jurisdiction. The main allegations involve illegal machine gun conversions. But nothing—*nothing*—anyone in the cult might have done comes even close to justifying what the government did to them.[4]

Timothy McVeigh and Terry Nichols, accused of executing the Oklahoma City bombing, are known for their sympathy with the ideology of the racist right.

The publicity surrounding this case uncovered a disparate association of disenchanted groups who at least share with the Branch Davidians an apocalyptic worldview, dualistic thinking (particularly leading to tensions with government officials and policy), preoccupation with the right to possess weapons, and usually a few strongly opinionated and vocal leaders.[5] The rest of this article will analyze the religious rationale commonly shared among these groups which goes by the name "Christian Identity" and consider a genuine Christian response. Although few in number, the voices emanating from the Christian Identity movement demand careful attention as a threat to the central Christian claim that the gospel of Jesus Christ is for all people.

Christian Identity and the racist right

The racist right consists of a loose coalition of groups, diverse in specific beliefs, whose worldview is decisively shaped by anti-Semitism, racism, conspiracy theories, and a fascination with violence. The individuals who affiliate with such groups do so at various levels of commitment. Some share sympathy but do so from a distance. Others relate, at least initially, with regard to a single issue, so-called "bridge issues" (e.g., taxes, Waco, gun control). These issues entice the disenchanted to take a closer look. Still others participate with regularity at group gatherings. At the core are a fairly small number of "true believers" who rally around key leaders.

Michael Barkun, a premiere scholar on the subject, estimates 100,000–200,000 members of the racist right in the United States.[6] These individuals relate to such organizations as the Ku Klux Klan, John Birch Society, American Nazi Party, Neo-

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[4] James L. Pate, "A Blundering Inferno," *Soldier of Fortune* (July 1993), 38, quoted in Tabor and Gallagher, 131.

[5] The Branch Davidian movement itself differs from the Christian Identity groups at many significant points, particularly in its premillennialism and its attempt to interpret the Book of Revelation as predicting contemporary events. It is important to stress that the Branch Davidians themselves are not directly shaped by Christian Identity, although they do share the aforementioned characteristics.

[6] Michael Barkun, "Militias, Christian Identity and the Radical Right," *The Christian Century* 112 (Aug 2-9, 1995): 740.

Nazi Skinheads, Posse Comitatus, Aryan Nations, The Order, Christian-Patriots Defense League, and a host of militia and survivalist groups (Freemen, Militia of Montana, Michigan Militia Corps, Arizona Patriots, etc.).

Among those belonging to the racist right, Barkun further estimates that 20,000–30,000 adhere to the basic precepts of Christian Identity, an umbrella term which refers to the common religious ideology of those who affiliate with the racist right. Christian Identity beliefs are promoted and nurtured in a great variety of small churches, Bible study groups, and political organizations, together with the books, magazines, and pamphlets they publish. Some of the organizations representing Christian Identity convictions are Covenant, Sword and Arm of the Lord; Church of Israel; Church of Jesus Christ Christian; Church of the Creator; the American Covenant Church; and the Christian Defense League. The use of words like "Christian" and "Church" in these names may easily deceive the seeker about their agenda. Barkun dates the formative years of Christian Identity from 1937-1975.[7]

Christian Identity beliefs

Two nineteenth century movements deserve brief mention as antecedents of contemporary Christian Identity: British Israelism and Pyramidism. The central claim of British Israelism is that the lost tribes of Israel actually migrated to northern Europe, settling in Britain, Germany, and Scandinavia. Thus the true chosen people are not the Jews but the Anglo-Saxon and Aryan peoples. This conviction appears in many permutations with many fallacious arguments, for example, that the British people derive from the tribe of Ephraim while white Americans descend from the tribe of Manasseh.[8]

A second curious antecedent of Christian Identity is found in the esoteric lore of pyramidism. Founded by David Davidson, pyramidism claims that great religious truth and an exact periodization of history are embedded in the precise mathematical proportions of the great pyramid of Cheops in Egypt.[9] Recent Christian Identity writers demonstrate considerable ambivalence toward pyramidology, especially as they resist predicting dates.

Because of the loose structure of the groups that reflect Christian Identity influence, it is impossible to speak about its beliefs except in general terms. There exists no binding creed. Christian Identity leaders select and interpret Scripture references to reinforce racist ideology, based on a highly idiosyncratic interpretation of the Bible. In every case, Christian Identity believers operate from a starkly dualistic worldview, interpret history as driven by a grand conspiracy, anticipate their own participation in an imminent apocalyptic war, and, above all, are committed to an ideology of white racial superiority and anti-Semitism. We will examine Christian Identity beliefs from four angles: (1) myth of origins, (2) racist Christology, (3) interpretation of the present situation, and (4) anticipation of the coming apocalypse.

1. *Myth of origins.* Christian Identity goes far beyond British Israelism in anathematizing Jewish origins. Its interpretation of human creation establishes the basis for

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[7] Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 47-71. Early leaders who decisively shaped Christian Identity include Gerald L. K. Smith, Conrad Gaard, Bertrand Comparet, William Potter Gale, Wesley Swift, and Richard Butler.

[8] Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 3-45.

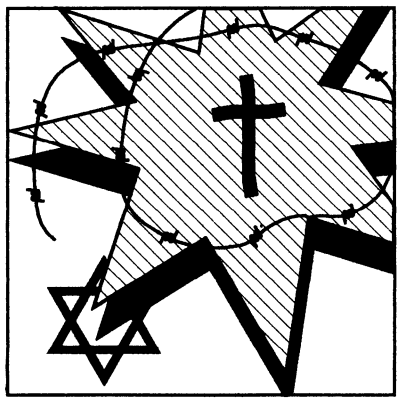
[9] For example, George R. Riffert, *Great Pyramid: Proof of God* (Havermill, MA: Destiny Publications, 1952).

a total demonization of the Jews. Whereas Adam and Eve are the true parents of the "Adamic," i.e., white race, the Jews have as their original parents Eve and Satan.[10] Cain, the original murderer, is thus the son of the devil, which makes Jews children of Satan from their very origin. Cain took his wife from "pre-Adamic" (i.e., pre-human) creatures, the "mud people." This makes people of color also descendants of Satan's seed. In essence, original sin is understood as the mixing of races. Various theories exist to describe the circuitous wanderings of Cain's progeny. In an additional racist twist, Christian Identity accuses the Jews of being those who originally brought black slaves to the United States, so further serving to undermine and corrupt the purity of the white race.

Christian Identity's myth of human origin establishes the diabolical foundation for its entire belief system. Jews are ontologically evil. Christian Identity thus sees the Jews destined for all time to engage in conspiratorial schemes. The entire worldview is based on racist presuppositions. Note the preoccupation with the inheritability of evil in all that follows. Having demonized the Jews, all forms of opposition are justifiable.

2. *Racist Christology.* For Christians the phrase "racist Christology" is a veritable contradiction. Christians believe that in Jesus Christ all the barriers that divide humankind have been overcome (Rev 5:9). Yet Christian Identity asserts, through an extremely biased and selective choice of biblical texts, that belief in Jesus supports its racist claims.

Above all, Christian Identity refuses to acknowledge that Jesus is a Jew. He clearly cannot be Jewish because Jews are children of Satan. Jesus is a true Israelite (not a Jew), born on his mother's side from pure-blooded stock, through the line that includes Abraham and David.[11] So in Matthew 2:2, Jesus is not born "king of the Jews" but "king of the Israelites." This is defended as the accurate translation. All of these arguments lead to the conclusion that Jesus is of the white race.



In his ministry Jesus presents himself as a new Moses, a giver of laws. He declares his mission: "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Mt 15:24). This is construed to mean Jesus came only for the true Israelites, i.e., Anglo-Saxons. The New Testament polemic between Jesus and Jewish religious leaders becomes a matter of racial division to demonstrate Jesus' absolute opposition to the Jews. In John 8, for example, Jesus appears to call into question that the Jews are children of Abraham (8:39). Then Jesus' own words in 8:44 are cited to nail down Christian Identity's racist ideology: "You are from your father the devil, and you choose to do your father's desires." Finally, the infamy of the Jews is sealed for all time when they

[10] Jerry Walters, "Inside Extremist 'Theology,'" *The Lutheran* 8 (Nov 95): 24.

[11] John R. Fry, "Hate Crime in America", *Church and Society* 80 (May-June 90): 18f.

Christian Identity interprets contemporary history according to the framework of a comprehensive conspiracy theory.

become "Christ killers": "Then the people as a whole answered, 'His blood be on us and on our children!'" (Mt 27:25).

Ignoring the first-century context of Jesus' conflict with the religious leaders of his own Jewish heritage, Christian Identity exploits the potential of the New Testament for anti-Semitic interpretation to the furthest degree. This is the kind of vicious invective that leads to holocaust. The central message of Jesus' mercy, forgiveness, and compassion is limited to the white race only. One can scarcely imagine a more blasphemous distortion of the Christian gospel!

3. *Interpretation of the present situation.* Christian Identity interprets contemporary history according to the framework of a comprehensive conspiracy theory. Following the lead of the nineteenth-century work, *Protocols of the Elders of Zion,* the Jews are responsible for a massive conspiracy to destroy the white race and its civilization. Because of the identity of the Jews' ultimate ancestor, this conspiracy is finally directed by Satan.

Proponents of Christian Identity believe that, particularly after the second World War, control of the United States government has been taken over by Jews and their allies. The United States has come to be dominated by what Christian Identity believers name as the "Zionist Occupational Government." They see evidence for this takeover in diverse phenomena, e.g., that the Federal Reserve stands above and beyond legal control, the passage of the sixteenth amendment to the Constitution which authorizes Congress the authority to collect income taxes (this is claimed to be a central plank of the *Communist Manifesto*), President George Bush's advocacy of a "new world order," the alleged degeneracy of school curriculum, and the passage of gun control legislation (contra the second amendment).

Participants with the Jews in their conspiracy are the United Nations, Trilateral Commission, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Federal Reserve, IRS, FBI, Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms (BATF), Council on Foreign Relations, Anti-Defamation League, Masons, World Council of Churches (along with non-Identity churches of all kinds), the media, and intellectuals. All of these are in league with the Anti-Christ as history draws near to its violent climax.

Christian Identity adherents purport to be the authentic defenders of the U.S. Constitution (which properly ends with the Bill of Rights, i.e., the first ten amendments). The United States must be defended by true patriots as the white Christian nation it was intended to be. Thus they see themselves both as Christians and patriots at the same time. The original intent of the nation's founders was that government should be run on the local level.

Many followers of Christian Identity, such as members of the Posse Comitatus (literally, the "power of the county"), therefore refuse to acknowledge any government regulation beyond local control. Occasionally, attempts have been made by

those holding these views to win local elections.[12] In more instances, refusal to pay taxes, apply for drivers licenses, or obey federal or state laws have led to antagonism with government authorities. In the most extreme cases, owners declare their private property no longer to belong to the United States.

Christian Identity asserts there are many signs which indicate history is moving toward a violent end. In addition to the grand scale conspiracy which threatens to destroy the freedom and purity of the white race, there are other indicators of end-times degeneracy: interracial marriage, gay rights, feminism, and gun control. The perceived intensification of the persecution of "the faithful" is yet another sign. Government action against Gordon Kahl, Randy Weaver, and the Branch Davidians each summon believers to vigilance in resistance.[13] In spring 1996 the case of the Freemen in Montana offered new evidence of persecution to the faithful.[14] According to Christian Identity's interpretation of the present situation, conditions are nearly complete for a final showdown with the Zionist Occupational Government.

4. *The coming apocalypse.* Unlike dispensationalist fundamentalists, Christian Identity believers expect no rapture by which Jesus will deliver them from the wrath to come. Instead they are convinced that they themselves must endure the coming tribulation. Small communities take heed from the example of Noah before the flood. Therefore they prepare in survivalist mode: purchasing guns and ammunition, perfecting the technique of manufacturing bombs, building secure compounds, and stockpiling the necessities of food, clothing, medicine, and energy.

A glimpse of what to expect in the near future can be garnered from the plot of the fictional work by William L. Pierce, *The Turner Diaries* (first appearing in serial form between 1975-78 and published in paperback in 1978). The book presents a fictional diary of a certain Earl Turner from the year 1991 until his death, about two years later. According to the summary of *The Turner Diaries* by Michael Barkun:

> Turner finds himself repelled by new gun-control legislation (the novel's fictional Cohen Act), by ever-more-drastic forms of racial integration, and by a variety of urban ills attributed to blacks and Jews. A reluctant revolutionary, Turner nonetheless eventually finds and joins a clandestine group, the Organization, dedicated to unseating the existing government.... After the combat begins, he participates in the successful seizure of most of southern California, from which nonwhites are quickly expelled.
>
> The Organization has also seized Vandenberg Air Force Base, with its nuclear missiles.... In a final suicide mission, Turner flies a small plane armed with one of the warheads into the Pentagon. Thereafter, as an epilogue explains, the System begins to disintegrate, and in time, the Organization comes to control first North America and then Europe. In a genocidal assault on nonwhite areas of the world... "some 16 million square miles of the earth's surface, from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific and from the Arctic Ocean to the Indian Ocean, were effectively sterilized."[15]

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[12] Mary Nevans-Pederson, "Separatist Runs for Statehouse," *Telegraph Herald*, Dubuque, Iowa (August 31, 1996), 1.

[13] Cf. James Corcoran, *Bitter Harvest: The Birth of Paramilitary Terrorism in the Heartland* (New York: Penguin, 1995).

[14] Cf. the three-part series by Jerry Walters, "Local Pastor Explains 'Freemen' Movement," *Roundup Record-Tribune*, June 14, 21, and 28, 1995.

[15] Barkun, *Religion and the Racist Right*, 226f.

This brief synopsis begins to suggest the paranoia which drives members of the racist right. While not explicitly a Christian Identity writing, *The Turner Diaries* do contain explicit religious references which have fed the apocalyptic imaginations of many believers.

Among the explanations which contribute to an understanding of the appeal of Christian Identity among a rural population, economic desperation rates high.

Many members of Christian Identity groups expect themselves to be actors in the coming apocalyptic battle with the Zionist Occupational Government (ZOG). Those who are faithful are summoned to engage in the war when it begins. Armageddon will be a race war, Aryans versus the Jews, non-whites, and their deluded white allies. They must be prepared to fight and to survive. The use of nuclear weapons is anticipated. Because they calculate these areas to be less affected by nuclear fallout, some groups have gravitated either to the Northwest (Idaho/Montana) or to the Midwest (a so-called "Midwest Triangle"). Christian Identity leaders usually avoid setting a predicted date when the battle will begin, although occasionally someone will do so. Unlike many contemporary apocalyptic movements, the second coming of Christ seems to play an insignificant role in the overall scenario.

The basic beliefs of Christian Identity here outlined are extremely malleable in detail and subject to continual revision. For this reason and because of the hard-core racist ideology which drives the entire worldview, these are convictions difficult to refute. They serve to arouse deep loyalty in a cadre of true believers who thereby discover an identity by which to live and interpret their experience. Yet it remains imperative that those who confess the crucified and risen Jesus Christ both understand and challenge a worldview so distorted by fear and hatred.

Why Christian Identity?

The dramatic increase in the numbers of those attracted to the racist right in the last two decades, and especially to its religious expression in Christian Identity, deserves explanation. Furthermore, the prominence of those cases influenced by Christian Identity belief awakens us to the intensity that drives this movement. Three types of explanation will here be offered: cultural, economic, and religious.

James William Gibson presents a description of the *cultural* context in which the mixture of paramilitarism and Christian Identity could arise in his book, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America*.[16] Gibson attributes the rise of a "warrior myth" in the post-Vietnam era to the sense of anger and guilt of many men over the loss of this war and the damage thereby done to American pride,

[16] James William Gibson, *Warrior Dreams: Violence and Manhood in Post-Vietnam America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1994).

particularly the notion of American invincibility. Blaming "liberals" for undermining the war effort, the self-appointed warrior takes upon himself the task of atoning for the sins of the past. The warrior is a man not dependent on anyone else (especially not on women), who never shows emotion, and who always maintains meticulous self-control. The warrior focuses disciplined rage against the designated enemy. He engages in paramilitary training in order to prepare for the necessary sacrifice to come. Weapons assume an almost magical aura.

Gibson's account of the paramilitaristic subculture within the post-Vietnam era establishes one possible explanation for the rise of Christian Identity. The mind set of those caught up in "warrior dreams" would make them particularly susceptible to the religious rationale of the racist right.[17] Gibson outlines the mutual interplay between the two.

More immediate than this cultural explanation is another based on the sense of rage experienced by those facing *economic* hardship. Shannon Jung details the growing economic plight of many rural people: 82% believe the government is not really concerned about their problems.[18] The steady trend toward the economic displacement of rural people continues unabated, providing "fertile soil" for the rise of paramilitary and Christian radical right groups. This is particularly true for young, rural, white males. Jung comments:

> Young, rural, white males have less to lose than their older rural counterparts. They have less to start with; their futures seem even more uncertain. They have grown up in an historical period when the government's legitimacy was always in question. They have been susceptible to those ideologies and groups who seem to offer them some control over their future. They feel discriminated against, and indeed there is enough reality there to support such a hypothesis.[19]

Among those groups that have successfully appealed to this intense rage has been Christian Identity.

The case of Gordon Kahl in North Dakota further illustrates how economic hardship feeds paramilitarism and Christian Identity. Kahl was a member of Posse Comitatus whose militant refusal to pay taxes led to a shoot-out with government officials in February 1983. Two U.S. marshals were killed and three others critically wounded by Kahl and his supporters in the battle. Kahl himself and another lawman were killed in an arrest attempt five months later in rural Arkansas. Kahl's own ideology was interwoven with Christian Identity beliefs.[20] He became a missionary for its cause. The primary audience among whom his message was received: farmers experiencing the desperately hard times of the farm crisis, many even losing the farms which had remained in their families for generations. Kahl would especially travel to farm sales and auctions in order to pass out literature and talk to the people about his "analysis" of their plight. Among the explanations which contribute to an understanding of the appeal of Christian Identity among a rural population, economic desperation rates high.

A final *religious* explanation revolves around the human tendency to identify and attack individuals and groups as our scapegoats when times are challenging. The recent work of Rene Girard has highlighted

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[17] Gibson, 216-20.

[18] L. Shannon Jung, "Rural Rage: Lessons from the Oklahoma City Bombing," p. 319 in this issue.

[19] Jung, p. 320 in this issue.

[20] Corcoran, 38-41.

the perennial human phenomenon of scapegoating as a way of resolving conflict that threatens to devolve into chaos.[21] Girard argues that the origin of all religion emanates from scapegoat rituals, usually disguised in mythological garb.

Without rehearsing the entirety of his elaborate scholarship, suffice it to say that the conspiracy theories and racist ideology of Christian Identity function as a contemporary and virulent illustration of an age-old phenomenon.[22] The loss of security experienced by those in the post-Vietnam era under the pressure of economic marginalization leads inevitably to the identification of a scapegoat, in this case, Jews, people of color, and all those who are seen cooperating with them. Christian Identity feeds upon a tradition of anti-Semitism that is deep and wide. By scapegoating the Jews, attention is directed at an identifiable enemy who can be blamed for an entire range of threatening phenomena. Notice how in Christian Identity the focus shifts away from Jesus as the final scapegoat. Instead in this ideology, the Jews, offspring of Satan, must yet atone for their sins, especially their sins against the white race.[23]

Responding to Christian Identity

How can Christian people respond to the religious claims and racist ideology of Christian Identity? Where individuals have already been attracted to elements of Christian Identity thinking, it is important to acknowledge the pain and fear which drives such a movement while offering a reasonable and scripturally-sound framework of interpretation. The adaptability and dualism of Christian Identity beliefs make it difficult to refute the convictions of a "true believer."[24] To oppose this position puts one on the side of the conspirators and ultimately on the side of the devil.

But there are many, less deeply steeped in Christian Identity, who need to be persuaded to see its heretical content by the standard of orthodox Christian teaching. Christian Identity distorts basic Christian teaching about creation and redemption. The goodness of God's creation of all people is contradicted by Identity teaching. Likewise, orthodox Christian teaching insists that Christ's redeeming death on the cross is for all sinners alike. Jesus died once-for-all to atone for human sin and no one else needs to repeat the atonement. The central biblical teaching of God's mercy for all and the commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself need to be spoken clearly in the face of Christian Identity assertions.

The ideas promulgated by Christian Identity have serious and dire consequences if ignored. Christian congregations must hear in the racist religious rhetoric of Christian Identity a call to educate both youth and adults about biblical interpretation and theology. The creation stories of Genesis and the apocalyptic writings deserve particular attention insofar as these texts are severely misinterpreted by Christian Identity. We need to understand and carefully explain the apparent anti-Jewishness of some New Testament texts with reference to the polemical context of the first century. Special

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[21] Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*, with J. M. Oughourlian and G. Lefort (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987).

[22] For some other contemporary applications of Girard's work, see Gil Baille, *Violence Unveiled: Humanity at the Crossroads* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

[23] Cf. Craig L. Nessan, "Violence and Atonement," *dialog* 35 (Winter 96): 26-34.

[24] Eric Hoffer, *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements* (New York: Harper & Row, 1951).

educational efforts need to focus on the dynamics of racism, with special emphasis on how religion has been and continues to be used in racist ideology. "Dismantling racism" remains an unfinished agenda for the church, as the rise of "Christian" hate groups so graphically demonstrates.[25]

Christian Identity also raises questions about the ministry of the church to the economically distressed. While the church often plays a tremendous role in providing material relief to members who face economic hardship, its record in terms of advocacy on behalf of whole classes of people is not nearly so strong. Christian Identity takes root exactly where certain individuals are angry, threatened, and feel like they have lost their voice. It provides an outlet to their anger and a comprehensive (if simplistic) explanation of their experience. Moreover, it appeals to the deeply human tendency to identify and lash out against a scapegoat. The church needs to intensify its efforts at addressing the economic dynamics which contribute to economic decline and thereby also provide an alternative channel of action. Congregations and coalitions of congregations must raise a louder voice against policies which undermine local economies and displace people.

Finally, the emergence of Christian Identity amid other apocalyptic movements raises profound questions about hope and hopelessness at the end of the twentieth century. So much popular religiosity appears motivated by the desire to secure safety and comfort for ourselves and our families while abandoning all confidence in the benefit of public institutions. An apocalyptic mood of hopelessness about the future prevails even as an attitude of instant gratification consumes the present. Movies, music, and art instruct us that because time is short, we had better live for the moment.

The prevalence of apocalyptic scenarios—Christian Identity only demonstrates a particularly extreme type—raises the question about the need for an alternative eschatology. The apocalyptic understanding of the future, which once offered hope to a persecuted minority and a basis for resistance, when adopted by the majority in an affluent culture, serves to reinforce the status quo and stifle any sense that constructive change is possible. To begin to develop an eschatology based on an evolutionary rather than apocalyptic framework would provide a basis for claiming human responsibility in the face of a yet-to-unfold future. A truly Christian response to that future would entail commitment to its transformation according to the values of love and justice as embodied in the person of Jesus.

Responding to Christian Identity and related cultural, economic, and religious developments provides the church an occasion to redouble its efforts in education, advocacy, and constructive theology. Although the absolute number of those committed to Christian Identity is relatively few, the situation which gives rise to its extremism makes its potential influence far greater. We do well to pay attention to the voice of the racist right and respond proactively as the church of the gracious and merciful Jesus to counteract its message of hatred. We need to make totally clear that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the message of God's unconditional love for *all* people.

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[25] Joseph Barndt, *Dismantling Racism: The Continuing Challenge to White America* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1991).

The Burning of Black Churches and the Ecclesiology of American Civil Religion

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The burning of black churches, a long smoldering phenomenon, sparked news stories for mainline media in the summer of 1995, and then, flames quickly doused by a fire-etardant mixture of genuine concern, guilt and self-interest, the public once again falsely assumed that the fire of racism was controlled if not out.

This is a renewed sign of the inadequacy of the ecclesiology of American Civil Religion (ACR), the nation's religion of the public sphere. African-Americans and their black churches have never been included in American Civil Religion. Now the burning of the buildings of these communities of solidarity and hope would seek to erase them even from their private sphere. This nation's inability to include and maintain a healthy diversity threatens to intensify as we arm ourselves against one another through gun, bomb and torch.

One year after the nation took note of the burnings, a Gallop poll released June 10, 1997, indicated that blacks and whites are miles apart in their opinions about how blacks are treated. Even though more whites than ever show racial acceptance, most whites say blacks are not discriminated against, 79% believing blacks have as good a chance as whites of getting jobs. Only 46% of blacks say their chances are as good as whites. The survey showed that the majority of blacks and whites agree on one thing: race relations will always be a problem in this country.[1]

The real significance of the burnings should be determined by those whose churches burned. This article dare not presume to fully understand. But members of each faith community in this country need to take note of an attack on any faith community. We also need to re-examine the role of civil religion, and to discern our mission in a pluralistic society.

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[1] *USA Today*, June 11, 1997, p. 2A.

Beyond conspiracy: racism

Shirlee Taylor Haizlip recalls the role of black churches he witnessed as a child when he visited many rural churches where his father was guest preacher:

> To reach many of the churches, we drove up deserted dirt roads covered by gracefully arching kudzu-fringed trees. There stood the church, often the only building for miles around. Never lonely looking, it seemed instead a natural part of the landscape, splendid in its simplicity. Usually there was a modest graveyard somewhere near. The bones of slaves lay side by side with the bones of their emancipated children. All of their spirits were free to be free, at last. As I grew older I would learn about the lives of the church members, would grow to understand that there, in that place, every single church member was *somebody*.
>
> In their roles as deacons, trustees, missionaries and choir members, those domestics, handymen, cotton and tobacco farmers and teachers sang and prayed. They looked after the elderly, encouraged the young to learn, and rallied their communities in times of crisis. It did not escape my understanding that the church encompassed all. Seldom were there outcasts. As an adult I understand that the churches were indeed the collective soul of black folks.[2]

"The church stands as a symbol of black pride and self-sufficiency," said Rose Sanders, a black lawyer in Selma, Alabama. "Burning one is as close as you can come to a lynching without killing somebody."[3]

In facing the fires, a U.S. Rights Commission found that while only 20% of the burnings were directly racially motivated, racism and racial prejudice still cripple this nation. The Center for Democratic Renewal questions the investigations. Federal as well as local and state investigations of the 124 mostly rural, historically black and multiracial churches which were firebombed, burned or vandalized from January 1990 through October, 1996[4] tended to blame the victim. They often dismissed the idea of deliberate arson due to a climate of white supremacy, opting instead to question the members about burning their own churches down.

Others hold to the belief that the fires were mere coincidence. The National Council of Churches released facts that showed more than 60 African-American and multiracial churches, most in the southeast, were burned from January 1995 through June 1996, more than in the previous five years combined. Proportionately the rash of black church burnings is four times as high as that for white churches. Many churches had no fire insurance or are having difficulty collecting. Others are being dropped by insurance carriers.[5]

Ecclesiological exclusion: a long history

Whites, included in the ecclesiology of the civil religion, failed to recognize the significance of the black church for those ex-

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[2] Shirlee Taylor Haizlip, "We Knew What Glory Was," *The New York Times* (Sunday, June 23, 1996): Sec. 4, p. 13 (excerpts).

[3] Jack E. White, "Playing with Fire," *Time* 148 (March 18, 1996): 45.

[4] "Black Church Burnings in the South," Report of Six-Month Preliminary Investigation, Atlanta, GA: Center for Democratic Renewal, June 10, 1996. The burnings listed by state: Kentucky: 4; Georgia: 6; Mississippi: 20; Florida: 6; Alabama: 9; South Carolina: 30; Tennessee: 13; Louisiana: 7; Arkansas: 11; Virginia: 3; North Carolina: 7; Maryland: 2; Texas: 15; Oklahoma: 1; Washington: 5; Oregon: 1; Arizona: 1; Missouri: 1.

[5] *Campaign Against the Burning of Churches* brochure, New York: National Council of Churches, November, 1996.

cluded. Whites tended to believe there was nothing racial about the fires. While one might see few daily signs of racial animosity, the attack on African-American churches was seen as an attack on the heart of the black community, its political, social, educational and spiritual center.

Whites, motivated by genuine care adulterated by the guilt of racism, helped raise money and rebuild the churches. Had they been able to find a conspiracy by a few on the radical fringe, they could have exonerated themselves from the racism which still smolders. But the commission which held forums in six states reported that racism is a problem much greater than arson. Simply rebuilding structures would not dismantle racism. Simply sending money would not include African-Americans in the ecclesiology of a nation which believes it has the soul of a church.

The rash of church fires revived memories of the 1963 bombing of the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham. A news service reported:

> Birmingham, Sept. 15—A bomb hurled from a passing car blasted a crowded Negro church today, killing four girls in their Sunday school classes and triggering outbreaks of violence that left two more persons dead in the streets... as darkness closed over the city hours later, shots crackled sporadically... city police shot a 16-year-old Negro to death when he refused to heed their command to halt after they caught him stoning cars. A 13-year-old Negro boy was shot and killed as he rode his bicycle in a suburban area north of the city.
>
> The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. wired President Kennedy from Atlanta that he was going to Birmingham to plead with Negroes to 'remain non-violent.' But he said that 'unless immediate Federal steps are taken there will be in Birmingham and in Alabama the worst racial holocaust this nation has ever seen'... the coroner's office identified the dead girls as Denise McNair, 11; Carol Robertson, 14; Cynthia Wesley, 14, and Addie Mae Collins, 10. One of the girls was decapitated."[6]

Five years later King would be dead and riots would erupt across the nation.

The Rev. Joseph W. Ellwanger, pastor of Cross Lutheran Church, Milwaukee, was pastor in Birmingham in 1963. The father of Denise McNair was a member of Ellwanger's congregation. Speaking at a dinner of the Lutheran Human Relations Association June 29, 1996, Ellwanger said:

> As we gather on a hot and steamy June evening to remember 40-plus years of LHRA's duels with racism and other sins that have blunted the Church's witness to the gospel over the years, I have to say we've come a long way—and we have a long way to go....
>
> I remember traveling to the LHRA Institutes in the early '60's... we packed a lunch to eat because we knew we would not find a restaurant between Birmingham and Louisville that would serve an integrated group.
>
> All that has changed, of course, thanks to the movement and the demonstrations and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. We easily forget the progress. Yet even as we praise God for progress... just two days ago I attended the funeral of an African American Baptist pastor and his wife who lived in Milwaukee for some 40 years. Their accomplishments and their witness was so powerful that there was a long article and picture in the Milwaukee *Journal Sentinel*, as well as an editorial... an editorial! Some 40 years ago the story might not have been mentioned at all... but the lives of Blacks and Whites in Milwaukee in 1996 are still so separate that there were only two non-Black persons in the packed church.[7]

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[6] United Press International news release, September 16, 1963.

[7] Joseph W. Ellwanger, "Reflections at the LHRA Dinner, June 29, 1996," *Vanguard* (Sept/Oct 1996), 4.

Names, e.g. Negro, Black, African-American, have changed, as have laws, but the deep roots of racism remain. Once again the black church is the target of violence. Still the dominant whites exclude African-Americans from full participation in the community of the nation and exclude themselves from the black church.

A conspiracy theory is not new either. Vincent Harding, African-American historian, noted that near the end of the Detroit rebellion of 1967 Lyndon Johnson made a special address to the nation. He was frightened and so was all of America. Johnson suspected that a black revolutionary conspiracy was at work. "The nation was frightened, confused.... In spite of what Lyndon Johnson suspected there was no organized, national black revolutionary movement."[8]

The conspiracy theory is a way to isolate the issue and relegate the problem to a few. Racism is more insidious than that and the African American struggle for freedom is more powerful.

> The Other American Revolution is the longest, unbroken, active struggle for freedom ever carried on in the annals of American history. Covering more than three hundred years, costing untold thousands of lives, its continuing existence is at once a monument to the human spirit and a rebuke to all those who believe that the only American revolution was a temporary struggle that began and ended two centuries ago.[9]

A flurry of conversation; fury unassuaged

Although 1996 investigations found no organized conspiracies, Rose Sanders, a black lawyer in Selma, believed that it was no coincidence that the fire at New Liberty Baptist church in Tyler, Alabama, was set just two days before thousands gathered to commemorate the Selma demonstrations that led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

The Clinton administration assigned more than 200 federal agents to investigate the suspicious arsons.[10] At a House Judiciary Committee hearing May 21, 1996, federal officials testified they had found no evidence of a conspiracy. Joseph E. Lowery, president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, in response to pursuing only a conspiracy theory said he was not surprised at this feeble response because the nation has denied and downplayed racism throughout its history. One committee member, Sheila Jackson Lee, complained of the lack of passion among her colleagues, saying the hearing was little more than the "pleasant experience of making pleasant inquiries." She warned, "you've got burned churches and burned history; you've got intimidated communities... we have a tragedy brewing here."[11]

During the summer of outrage, conversation continued politely over the Internet. A sampling:

"I appreciate your posting the listing of church burnings. I really hate to do this but I feel it necessary to take you to task on something. Almost 50% of the churches

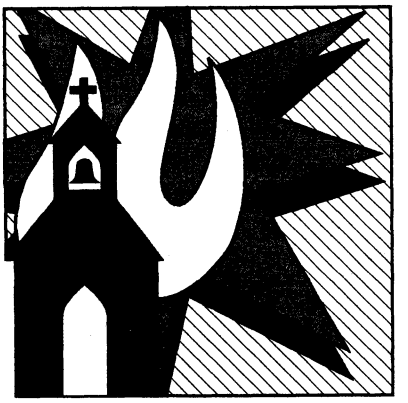
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[8] Vincent Harding, *There Is a River: The Black Struggle for Freedom in America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1985), 194.

[9] Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution* (Los Angeles: Center for Afro-American Studies, University of California; Atlanta: Institute of Black World, 1980), xv.

[10] On January 19, 1997, President Clinton, 7 months after he gave federal oversight to the investigations of the church burnings, said there had been 104 arrests, many times the normal arrests in arson cases. There were 48 convictions; 221 investigations are pending.

[11] "News: Outrage Over Church Burnings," *Christian Century* 113 (June 5-12, 1996): 608-9.



which have been burned are anglo or multi-racial. This is not just an attack on black churches."

"I, too, am confused about this... it doesn't erase the problem, but does seem to shift the emphasis from racism to something else, whether anger at the generic church or at religion."

"Does anyone know available source for this information???"

"Have you hugged a Presbyterian today?"

"The Klan considers all who support amity between the races, 'Race Traitors....'"

"Tomorrow morning, in our theology study class, my elders and I will be discussing this issue, studying the PCUSA's [Presbyterian Church USA] Confession of 1967 .... We all need to pray for these churches, and take a united stand against this—or ANY other form—of racial hatred and violence."

So the Internet conversations went on... for a while.

One hears different words from members of churches which had been bombed. Charlie Means, a church deacon at Mt. Zion in rural Western Alabama: "I just wanted to ask God why. 'This is your church, Lord. We always tried to serve you.' The hurt is still there, like seeing your loved one being put in the grave."

In Greene County, Alabama, whites still control the economy but the political power has shifted so that blacks now control the government and the investigations. An African-American district attorney, the first black to hold such office in Alabama, notes that on the very day newspapers reported two young white men he prosecuted were sentenced to five years in prison for vandalizing black churches in Sumter County, fire destroyed two churches in neighboring Greene County. And someone fired two shotgun blasts into the home of black circuit-court judge Eddie Hardaway who had sentenced the white men.

But white chief state arson investigator John Robeson says in the 6-1/2 years he has investigated 38 fires, with 20 arrests, he has not been able to identify any racial motives. Likewise white civic leader Pam Montgomery feels there is no racism present.

But a local African-American politician and member of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference says this is simply denial. "We do not have a history of burning our own churches down. Our schools are still separate, our churches are still separate; eleven o'clock Sunday morning is still the most segregated hour of the week."

African-American Carol Zippert, a local newspaper editor in Greene County, Alabama, believes the church burnings are an enlargement of intimidation efforts because the "Black Church is still the heart of the black community, its educational, political and social center." It is likely churches will be rebuilt long before a sense of trust on the part of those who worship there.[12]

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[12] Randall Pinkston, "Facing the Fire" on CBS Sunday Morning, June 16, 1996.

The strikingly different interpretations of blacks and whites, the search for a conspiracy, the stirring of memories, the patterns of rising intimidation once blacks become more part of the public communal life, point to a deeper significance to the burning of black churches than the fading of news accounts would lead us to forget.

American civil religion: an inadequate ecclesiology

The burning of black churches is a renewed sign of the inadequacy of the ecclesiology of American civil religion. Jean Jacques Rousseau proposed that social cohesion would be served by the establishment of a civil religion centered on the existence of God and advocating virtue to consecrate the common social life.[13] Alexis de Tocqueville empirically observed a form of civil religion that emerged precisely in the situation of church-state separation, the "peculiar" religious force unchallenged behind the political philosophy.[14]

Robert Bellah's article of a quarter century ago, writing in between the 1963 assassination of John F. Kennedy and the 1968 assassinations of Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., gave words to the phenomenon: "While some have argued that Christianity is the national faith, and others that church and synagogue celebrate only the generalized religion of 'the American Way of life,' few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America.[15]

Between his 1967 *Daedalus* article and his 1975 *The Broken Covenant* would be the years of this country's worst race riots (superseded in number of deaths only by the L.A. riots of May, 1992). Bellah writes (1975) that America was facing its third time of trial. America's myth of origin, its self-interpretation of being God's chosen people, called and miraculously protected to cross its own Red Sea of the Atlantic into the Promised land, had two serious flaws: what to do with the people who were already here, and how to understand the people brought here against their will in slave ships, neither miraculously protected.[16] "Africans, with their own immense cosmological symbolism—were forced to become actors in the European dream under the most tragic circumstances possible.... Thus at the very beginning of American society there was a double crime, the incalculable consequences of which still stalk the land."[17]

The ecclesiology of this American civil religion was broken, flawed from its inception. Bellah and colleagues a decade later focused on the basic concept of cohesiveness of American society. They saw the promise of America slipping away under the guise of separation and individualism. But rather than renounce the exclusivity of the ecclesiology of American civil religion, they called for a recovery of the concept of the common good.[18]

Catherine Albanese was aware of the inadequate ecclesiology of American civil religion and the danger of telling the story of the cultural religion from only the domi-

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[13] Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses* (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., 1913), 121.

[14] Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. 1 (New York: Schocken Books, 1961): 6.

[15] Robert H. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96 (Winter, 1967): 1.

[16] Robert N. Bellah, *The Broken Covenant* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1975), 36.

[17] Bellah, *The Broken Covenant*, 37.

[18] Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985).

nant white denominational viewpoint.[19] "To face up to the implications of pluralism means to recognize that it is problematic to recite, even if artfully and inclusively, one story *before* exploring the realities of the many stories."[20]

Albanese's concern that the dominant have excluded the many is intensified in Charles Long's critique of the civil religion. "American" often meant Christian European immigrants, which overlooks many other people. Consciously or unconsciously it served to "enhance, justify and render sacred the history of European immigrants in this land."[21] American civil religion, from the beginning, had an inadequate ecclesiology linked inextricably to a false theology of redemption and mission.

Central in the creed of American civil religion is "chosenness" and "righteousness," manifest destiny and leadership in two world wars. The United States' self-image was shaken in Viet Nam and is confused in the post-cold-war global economy. What is the United States to be if not God's only chosen nation? If the United States is chosen then things cannot go wrong for Americans. But when things do go wrong, there needs to be someone to blame. If other nations are no longer combatant but partners, whom are we to blame? If we cannot find a clear enemy outside, we turn against each other, nursing old hatreds, particularly racism.

Repentance has always been significantly absent from American civil religion. In ACR, slavery was justified, and white privilege was expected as part of "chosenness." And even though Lincoln's Second Inaugural address speaks directly of slavery as an offense against God's righteous judgments, emancipation in retrospect was more self-congratulation than repentance. Absent was the role slaves played in their own emancipation. American civil religion has difficulty naming racism as an original sin because America has not felt it needed a Redeemer as much as it needed to be a redeemer nation to the world.

Black churches being the locus of the civil rights struggle was not incidental, "for the civil rights battle represented the black confrontation with an American myth" that dehumanized their being.[22] That is an important point. If we are to begin to understand the significance of the burning of black churches today, we must realize: (1) African-Americans gathered in churches, (2) outside the ecclesiology of the civil religion, (3) invisible to whites who would not see, (4) but strong within their own excluded, (5) religious communities. They gained strength for their fight to be free from slavery, and to insist on their civil rights a century later. The Black Church is a sign of hope and at least an implicit challenge to the belief system of the white privilege of American Civil Religion. Will black churches be hope or threat to a nation which has come to doubt its own role in being a redeemer nation to the world?

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[19] "The Ghosts of Mississippi," A Rob Reiner film about the 30-year delay in dealing justly with the murder of Medgar Evers, released in December, 1996, while praised by many critics, has been severely chastised by others as another attempt by whites to assuage their own guilt, because the story is primarily told from the perspective of the white prosecuter.

[20] Catherine L. Albanese, *America; Religions and Religion* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 1981), xix. Albanese proceeds with her history beginning with the "manyness" of the Native American tribes.

[21] Charles Long, "Civil Rights—Civil Religion: Visible People and Invisible Religion," in Richey and Jones, *American Civil Religion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), 212.

[22] *Ibid.*, 122.

African-American voices: a call to reform civil religion

Charles Long notes that once black people are visible (e.g. have gained political roles in the public sphere) they must be dealt with. One cannot simply "add" them, because that doesn't take into account the relationship of the invisible ones in the historically developing civil religion. The concealment of the reality of "others" has shaped the story. For Long, religion means orientation in the ultimate sense, how one comes to terms with the ultimate significance of one's place in the world. For the majority culture, African-Americans have always been signified, meaning their significance ascribed. If religion relates to meaning, then there exists a dynamic of concealment.[23]

White Euro-America continues to conceal from itself the visibility of African-Americans' cultural experience and the meaning of its presence in the whole culture. When the burning of black churches could no longer be concealed, its meaning was concealed in the conspiracy theory which could be named as a cause and then merely disproven.

With the civil religion functioning as an excluding ecclesiology, one might be surprised that not all African-Americans dismiss or disparage American civil religion. The creeds of ACR relied heavily on biblical imagery. The epic of the deliverance of the children of Israel which was used to justify the Revolutionary War was not applied to the issue of slavery, but slaves did not miss its relevance. Estranged in their servitude, as they were exposed to the Christian Bible, there was no part with which they were so familiar as the deliverance from Egypt, but Egypt this time meaning the nation's institution of slavery. God's chosen people did not constitute a nation among nations; deliverance belonged to those who suffered unjustly among all peoples and who would hunger and thirst after righteousness.[24]

> Repentance has always been significantly absent from American civil religion.

African-Americans interpreted ACR creeds in a way which resulted in the black church freedom movements and in renewal movements to call the nation to act justly on its own civil creeds. Vincent Harding holds hope for the civil faith, claiming it on behalf of blacks and other oppressed peoples, believing that through their struggles the entire nation will benefit. The dream of American civil religion can provide impetus for change. The very basic contradictions endemic to America call America to live up to its promise, but this time for all its citizens. "We must finally ask ourselves what kind of human society we want here, in America... We must ask ourselves—not once, but continuously—how much we are prepared to pay for the creation of a new society in America."[25]

The civil religion has functioned differently for African-Americans and per-

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[23] Charles H. Long, *Significations* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986), 129.

[24] Nathan O. Hatch and Mark A. Noll, *The Bible in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), 550-51.

[25] Vincent Harding, *The Other American Revolution*, 210.

haps for all those outside ACR's white, Christian, Euro-American ecclesiology. Whereas white Christians began to separate their public from their private faith, for African-Americans the life shaped by biblical narrative was the means by which they created a public life for themselves, included themselves in the ecclesiology which would be this nation. Paradoxically, the lack of inclusion in the ecclesiology of the civil faith oppressed African Americans and allowed them to carry their own creedal convictions into the public arenas.

Because blacks' public participation was denied, devalued, and feared, their private religious expression became their public act.[26] Whereas membership in mainline denominations, i.e., the dominant white Protestant denominations, was once important for public lives, it is now seen only as "religious preference."[27]

Burning black churches seeks to erase the faith communities of those who are excluded from the ecclesiology of American civil religion, but who refuse to remain invisible in their own nation. This is a phenomenon, a symbol and a signal, this time in rural America, to an ever more violent nation which refused to learn from its own Civil War and from the urban civil rebellions of a quarter century ago.

If we are to affirm a civil religion at all, it must have an inclusive ecclesiology which values the particularities of all its faith communities. When particular churches are relegated to a lesser role or eradicated, the nation itself can become its own church with its own liturgy and symbols and the chief definer of its own identity. Fearing, loving and trusting itself above all things, it then can create itself in its own image and becomes its own god, a danger rather than a redeemer to the world. Those estranged, burned out ones may be the prophetic voices needed by this nation.

Beyond the fires of rage: directions

Andrew Hacker says, "Race has been an American obsession since the first Europeans sighted 'savages' on these shores... race in America took on a deeper and more disturbing meaning with the importation of Africans as slaves.... Black Americans are Americans, yet they still subsist as aliens in the only land they know."[28]

Studs Terkel contends that race obsesses everybody, even those who think they are not obsessed. An obsession rules us, as a god might; the original sin of racism remains a powerful obsession, ruling everything, so all-permeating that although we cannot escape, we must refuse to acknowledge its presence.[29] Racism is real. It goes beyond prejudice and discrimination and even transcends bigotry, largely because it arises from outlooks and assumptions of which we are largely unaware.

The inability to agree on whether or not racism has played a part in the burning of black churches itself testifies to the pernicious necessity in ACR to keep those excluded invisible, and to ignore the problem by "not understanding" it. "Most white Americans believe that for at least the last generation blacks have been given more than a fair chance and at least equal opportunity if not outright advantages. Moreover

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[26] See Gayraud Wilmore, *Black Religion and Black Radicalism* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1972).

[27] See Robert Bellah and Philip E. Hammond, *Varieties of Civil Religion* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1980), 170.

[28] Andrew Hacker, *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992), 3.

[29] Studs Terkel, *Race; How Blacks and Whites Think and Feel About the American Obsessions* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3.

few white Americans feel obliged to ponder how membership in the majority race gives them "powers and privileges."[30]

Many of the white liberals who were involved in the Civil Rights Movement have gone on to other issues, such as concern for the rain forests and the ozone layer. "It is not likely that dolphins will present themselves one day and proclaim that they wish to assume control of their own struggle."[31]

Michael Eric Dyson in *Race Rules* refers to the "U.S. of Amnesia."[32] America is both obsessed with race and fatigued by it. And yet he claims that the only organizing principle that is a community medium is still the church.

So which church? And what shall churches be and do? Albert Pero says there is a message for us to read, but to read it we must go beyond the fact that some people don't want to be bothered by multiculturality. "Some don't want to be bothered to realize that the Christian faith could be pluralistic, that Lutheranism could be pluralistic." We must move beyond the attitude that somebody "played the race card." "This isn't a game of cards," said Pero.

He went on: "We must take seriously our faith that God created all these people, that the Lord died for all these people, without the conditions we set up, and that the Spirit sparks a fire of love. That means believing that we have a God of abundance, and abundance of love and power and food, so you don't have to burn the guy who seems to be creeping up on you."[33]

Boston minister Eugene Rivers is dubious about inclusive ideals: "The secular liberal notion of an integrationist vision of America was unrealistic from the start, and it was never a realistic option for the black poor."[34] Because of the intense alienation of the colonized urban metropolitan centers he calls for a new shaping of black identity, urging black Christian leaders to take a role they have not assumed since the death of King, "You had a million men at the March (1995), and 600,000 of them were black church lay people without their leaders."[345]

The power of American civil religion cannot be underestimated. While it may hold some promise, its inadequate ecclesiology and false creeds need to be studied in order to understand the racism which corrodes incessantly and periodically erupts in acts of violence. Its belief in itself as God's chosen people was an Anglocentric or Eurocentric Creed to form one people, just like themselves. Thus current efforts toward ethnic pride are seen as a protest against an Anglocentric culture and feared as destructive of the American Creed. Joe Johnson, writing in *Crisis* in 1992, states: "'American Creed' was meaningless in word and deed, until African-Americans challenged the spirit and the letter of its laws and institution."[36]

If we are to affirm a civil religion at all it must have an inclusive ecclesiology which values the particularities of faith communities. This will call for *nationalization*, a process by which Americans see themselves as a single nation rather than as a collection

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[30] Hacker, 4.

[31] Hacker, 64.

[32] Michael Eric Dyson, *Race Rules* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1996).

[33] Albert P. Pero, Jr., Professor of Theology and Cross-cultural Studies, the Lutheran School of Theology at Chicago, telephone interview, October 31, 1996.

[34] Wendy Murray Zoba, "Separate and Equal," *Christianity Today* 40 (January 5, 1996): 19.

[35] *Ibid.*, 20.

[36] Joe Johnson, "Disuniting of America," *Crisis* 100 (June-July, 1992): 20. Johnson critiques *Disuniting of America* by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

of peoples, an ongoing process of unification. We need to reject *nationalism*, a secular religion, which teaches that the particularities of one's nation are not the result of history but are rooted somehow in the eternal notion of things, e.g.: "Since the nation is blessed, its will should and ought to prevail around the world.[37]

Anglo *Newsday* writer Fred Bruning comments in the Canadian journal, *Maclean's*, in 1992,

> Americans don't like this notion of historical continuity, the idea that there may be a connection between the slave blocks of Virginia and the burned-out storefronts of Los Angeles. We have only a comic-book notion of our own saga, filled, we think, with palefaced heroes and redskinned savages... as for black people, we know that they got a bad break way back when, but we have an awful time understanding how that unfortunate matter applies today.
>
> Be angry, be frightened, be anything you like, but once and for all get it straight: this is not going away. Sooner or later, America will have to face the truth that haunts its soul. Race is the fundamental issue of this country.[38]

What then must we do? We must not confuse American civil religion with Christianity, nor the Christ of the cross with the burning cross of white supremacy. We, as faith communities and as a nation, must fully recognize the racism of this courntry. In the Spring of 1997 the bishops of the Lutheran, Anglican, Roman Catholic and Methodist churches in South Carolina issued a statement confessing to the sin of racism and asking for forgiveness. We need to participate in the building and restoration of the burned historically black and multiracial church landmarks. The National Council of Churches is in partnership with Habitat for Humanity to rebuild.[39]

We need to continue to press for investigations of arsons in order to go beyond blaming the victim. Racially motivated acts of violence most often go unnoticed if local authorities are determined not to report them as hate crimes. "As long as violence remains the language by which the dominant culture maintains its power, the unheard will be forced to use violence to reach us with their demands for justice."[40] We need to work for economic justice in the face of long smoldering resentment at institutionalized economic inequity. We need to pray and to pray together.

So where are we now? Presidential inaugural addresses often signal current issues in American civil religion. President Bill Clinton's second inaugural, though judged by critics as unremarkable (Clinton's much heralded address on race on Saturday, June 21, 1997 was panned as "empty"), contained significant references. Falling on January 20, 1997, Martin Luther King Jr. Day, Clinton said that King's dream was the American dream and called on citizens to "redeem" the promises of America in the 21st century. Clinton used ACR imagery, calling America the promised land with a mission to the world (even claiming this to be the world's "indispensable" nation), but also named the scourge of slavery. He said that the divide of race has been America's constant curse and that each new wave of

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[37] Glenn T. Miller, *Religious Liberty in America* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1976), 120-21.

[38] Fred Bruning, "An American View: Black and White in America," *Maclean's* (June 1, 1992), 11.

[39] Contact NCC, 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY. A video, "The Churches Are Burning," is available rental free.

[40] The Los Angeles Theological Reflection Group, "A Christian Confession of Conscience," in *Dreams of Fire, Embers of Hope* (St. Louis: Chalice Press, 1992), 101.

immigrants become new targets for old prejudices, including that done in the name of religious or political ideology. His ACR position could be identified as a call for *renewal* of America's civil religion (He signed a proclamation making January 21 a National Day of Hope and Renewal) with an emphasis on the richness of diversity and a challenge to repair the breach.

Inaugural poet Miller Williams' vision was also of a renewed ACR. He included the "disenfranchised" who "want to be," calling us to "truly remember": "We mean to be the people we meant to be, to keep on going where we meant to go;" "many people coming together cannot become one people falling apart."

The hymn of American civil religion, the national anthem was sung at the close of the ceremonies, unembellished, very slowly, dignified by a black woman, Santita Jackson, and the Resurrection choir, members of churches destroyed by the fires in recent months. Commentators ignored this "unremarkable" speech. What will the nation have heard?

Perhaps most important, we must come together locally in churches and in the network of faith communities and talk, and listen, and dialog, no matter how difficult. People of color know a great deal about white America—they must in order to function in this country. Whites remain remarkably unaware of the lives, feelings and hardships of people of color. The latter are weary of educating white people. White people need to take responsibility for their own education. On the way toward trustworthy learning environments, in order to be different together we may need caucuses to provide people opportunity to explore difficult issues with members of their own race.

Oppressors, the white privileged in an exclusive civil ecclesiology, are usually the most ignorant, because it has been to their advantage to ignore and remain ignorant of the excluded and oppressed. So whites need to listen, not to judge, debate, defend, solve or critique, but simply to listen. And they need to believe what they are hearing.[41]

> We must not confuse American civil religion with Christianity, nor the Christ of the cross with the burning cross of white supremacy.

And we need to remember and learn... after the headlines have faded, and the embers have burned down. Flames can signify destruction and judgment. Or, in the invitation of Rev. Linnea Juanita Pearson,

> Come let us gather together again. Let us gather up the ashes, and blow upon the embers until a fresh spark ignites to give light to the life that is yet to come, that we might gather around this new fire of hope and warm ourselves.[42]

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[41] Andrea Ayvazian and Beverly Daniel Tatum, "Can We Talk?" *Sojourners* 25 (Jan-Feb 1996): 16-19.

[42] Linnea Juanita Pearson, "Out of the Ashes: 'A Terrible Beauty is Born,'" *Dreams of Fire, Embers of Hope*, 29.

The Virgin of Guadalupe, History, Myth, and Spirituality

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The Virgin of Guadalupe is the greatest spiritual symbol in Central America, Mexico, and the Southwest of the U.S.A. Also she is the most powerful female icon for millions of people who have followed her spiritual influence for centuries. Her place among many divinities of Mexico and Central America is very well known for religious leaders of those areas. Many people go to Mexico yearly to pay spiritual tribute, respect and honor to her.

Her followers did not frequently ask about her historicity or her apparition to the Indian people in the Tepeyac.[1] The history of Guadalupe's origin was never a question for those who believe in the real presence of Jesus' Mother in the Tepeyac. Questions about her authenticity and her connection with Tonantzin, an Aztec goddess, came from scholars or non-Catholic people.

The sixteenth century was crucial for Spain's conquest and implementation of its policy of domination of the New World. It was a time of resistance by the Indians, who did not want to surrender themselves, their culture, religion and economy to the invaders. It was at this time one could see mysterious apparitions of virgins in the New World. Those apparitions were symbols of acculturation through which Spain wanted to impose its culture and religion. The Nahuatl spirituality was not excluded from that process, which concerned those in Spain in charge of evangelism and acculturation of the new lands.

The Indian cosmogony was a configuration of the earth, its divinities, the people, and their history. Indians' divinities were dual, female and male. The female aspect of God was never a second category of importance in God's substance. In this duality one can find different names for these female and divine expressions. *Tonan* means the mother of the earth, *Coatlique* means the earthly mother, and *Cíhuacoatl* means a woman serpent or mother of wisdom. They understood *Toci* as God's mother and the heart of the earth and *Tonantzin* as our venerated mother. Tonantzin had her sanctuary in Tepeyac.[2]

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[1] A place close to Mexico City where traditionally people believe that Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego.

The legend

For the first quarter of the sixteenth century, the relationship between the conquerors and Indians was bad. Exploitation and slavery of Indians made communication impossible. For Indians everything from Spain was bad, even Christianity. Communications between civil authorities and missionaries were very difficult, too. At this time legend says that on December 9, 1531, Guadalupe appeared to Juan Diego, a humble Christianized Náhautl Indian, when he was in his way to Tlatelolco to hear mass. He heard music and a voice which pronounced his name. Juan Diego walked in the direction of the voice and suddenly saw a beautiful woman, radiant and light, who introduced herself as the Mother of the True God from whom everything lives, the Creator of heaven and earth. She wanted a temple to be built at that site and wanted to live among the Indian people to serve them in their needs and painful lives. The Lady asked Juan Diego to talk with the Bishop in his palace. The Bishop received Juan Diego but did not believe the story. Juan Diego returned to his people and on the way, the Virgin appeared to him again inquiring about her message. Juan Diego was sad about the answer of the Bishop. He asked the Virgin to send a messenger more important than himself, since he was only a poor, non-educated Indian. The Lady asked Juan Diego to return to the Bishop's palace and give him a sign. On December 12, Juan Diego had another encounter with the Lady of Tepeyac who at this time asked Juan Diego to take some beautiful roses from the mountain and bring them to the Bishop as proof of her petition. Juan Diego took the roses and brought them to the Bishop. When Juan Diego opened his *tilma*[3], the roses fell from it. On top of the tilma was the figure of Our Lady of Guadalupe. The Bishop and his servant saw this and fell on their knees before such a miracle.[4]

The doubt

Not everybody agrees with this legend. Historians' critical eyes see other dimensions of the narrative. Xavier Campos Ponce, Mexican historian, in 1970 used the critical historical method to research the legend of Tepeyac.[5] His conclusions denied the authenticity of the legend because it did not have enough basis in the events of early post-conquest Mexico. Many of the apparition materials came from the people's piety and popular religiosity.[6] Ponce also quotes the prestigious Mexican historian and bibliographer, Joaquin García Icazbalceta, the first historian to apply a historical-critical approach to the Guadalupan records, who developed similar conclusions about the documents of the legend. Ponce also brings an original contribution about the testimony of the Bishop of Tamaulipas, Mexico, Don Eduardo Sánchez Camacho, who in 1910 wrote a document declaring

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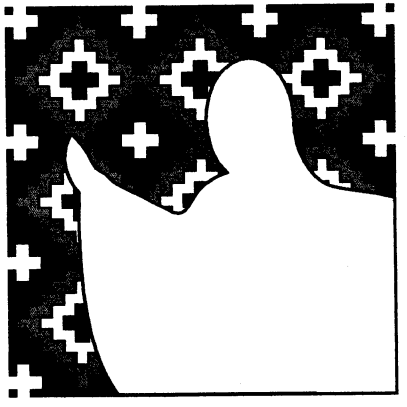
[2] See Virgilio Elizondo, *La Morenita* (San Antonio: MACC, 1981), 24.

[3] Indian cloak like a poncho.

[4] Elizondo, *La Morenita*, 77 ff.

[5] Xavier Campos Ponce, *La Virgen de Guadalupe y la Diosa Tonantzin* (Mexico, D.F., 1970).

[6] See also Louise M. Burkhart, *The Cult of the Virgin of Guadalupe in Mexico*, in *South and Meso-American Spitituality*, ed. Gary H. Gossen, Vol 4 (New York: Crossroad, 1993), 188 ff. Burkhart also quotes James Lakhart, *The Nauhas after the Conquest: A Social and Cultural History of the Indians of Central Mexico, Sixteenth through Eighteenth Centuries* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1992), and William B. Taylor, *The Virgin of Guadalupe in New Spain: An Inquiry into the Social History of Marian Devotion*, in *American Ethnologist* 14 (1987): 9-33.



the apparition of Guadalupe in the Tepeyac to be false.[7] The document resulted in Sánchez Camacho's persecution by the Roman Catholic Church in Mexico and President Porfirio Diaz, leading to exile in the U.S.A. Later Camacho returned to Mexico and died in isolation at his Ranch "El Olvido."

The myth

Carlos Fuentes, Mexican writer, describes the presence of the Lady of Tepeyac as one of the masterpieces of Indian spirituality and syncretism.[8] Fuentes sees the creation of this new myth in the sixteenth century providing a new spiritual dimension for Indians. The question is: Was Tonantzin, the Aztec goddess, erased from the soul of Indians or do they worship still the Mother of the gods in Tepeyac? Fuentes praises not the Spaniards in creatively giving new directions for worshiping in the New World but Indians in accepting the new symbol which embraces their devotion to Tonantzin. A risky answer says that Tonantzin will be forever in Tepeyac under the names of Virgin of Guadalupe, Mother of God, Jesus' Mother, or Mother of the Creator. People can see in the Tepeyac the feminist worship of the universal goddess whether she is Tonantzin or Guadalupe. The myth goes beyond the semantic of names. In the New World, Tonantzin was not the first and only goddess who suffers a metamorphosis from goddess to saint. The Indians knew about those transformations as symbols of submission. Guadalupe in Mexico has her spiritual counterparts in La Caridad de Cobre in Cuba, the Virgin of Coromoto in Venezuela, the Virgin Alta Gracia in Dominican Republic, the Virgin del Valle in Argentina. The Indians accepted those symbols to protect their own spirituality. The goddess is still alive!

Aztecs did not have Christ in their theology and never accepted totally the second person of the Trinity. In their theology they had the god Quetzalcoatl, the Plumed Serpent who died and promised to return. Aztecs believed that Hernán Cortés was Quetzalcoatl and asked him to wear Quezaltcoatl's mask. The Christ figures in Mexico are all baroque and defeated, dead, prostrate, bleeding, whether they are on the cross or laid out in a glass bier. By contrast, the Virgin of Guadalupe is still the Lady of Tepeyac with roses and perfume. One can walk into a church in Mexico and see this difference, a glorious presence of the Mother rather than a triumphant Christology. People can see two different altars in the same church, one dedicated to a defeated Christ and the other to the glorious transformation of Tonantzin, full of flowers and lights. Fuentes adds that after the transformation of Quetzaltcoatl into Christ, it has been impossible to know who is worshiped at the

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[7] Xavier Campos Ponce, *La Virgen*, 147.

[8] Carlos Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror, Reflections on Spain and the New World* (Boston, New York, London: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1992), 146.

baroque altars of Puebla, Oaxaca, and Tlaxcala.[9] The same applies to Mary and Tonantzin.

Our Lady of Guadalupe's story brings to us the heart of popular religion in the Southwest. Alex García-Rivera analyzes stories which he divides into the "little story" and the core of the story, the semiotic or interpretation of the symbols of the story.[10] García-Rivera uses Virgilio Elizondo's method of analysis to reflect on the semiotic of the Virgin of Guadalupe's story.[11] Elizondo points out the message of the symbols of the "little story." He states that at the time of the apparition, the Spanish were building churches over the ruins of the Aztec temples. The tearing down and the building up was symbolic of the deeper struggle to destroy a people, even if the intention was to rebuild it. Juan Diego dared to go to the city of power. He demanded that the powerful change their plans and build a temple, not according to the plans of Spain, but within the *barriada* of Tepeyac, in the native land.[12] The center of Guadalupe's attention was not the splendor of the Spanish plans but the poverty and misery of those who lived on the periphery of society.[13]

The methodological reading of the semiotic leads us to penetrate the "mystery" of the "little stories" to the core of the story. Many times people were put down because of their illiteracy. Even today the message of our western culture is codified in volumes which few people can read. Many times people cannot read insurance papers or contracts, medical terminology in hospitals, specialized magazines, and so on. Similarly, we can read the "little story" but not the core. Missionaries to other lands treated people as "pagan" because they could not read the symbols of their spirituality. Many people died in the sixteenth century or in times of the "conquista" because they did not know the semiotic of those who worshiped God under different symbols. The conquerors read only one side of the story, the myth without the semiotic, and they blamed and killed the victim of the impositioning dominant culture. The key or truth of the semiotic was at the side of Juan Diego, and the Bishop, as a dominant authority, could not understand it.

The myth as spirituality

The re-reading of the event of the Tepeyac opened a new dimension for the Latino spirituality in the New World. The vision in the Tepeyac has a parallel with Exodus and the call of Moses. It is a messianic mission for a people who were enslaved and exploited under the power of a modern Pharaoh. The issue was not the temple but the freedom of the people who inherited the land from their ancestors and then had to work in that land as slaves under their invaders. December the 12th and the Tepeyac became an historic sign of liberation. The time and the geographic place played an important role for the memory of a people who had no memories. Tepeyac was the central point for the New World equidistant from the North and the South extremities. There was no United States or Argentina at that time. The mountain of the revelation became the center of the message of liberation for a continent in submission

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[9] Fuentes, *The Buried Mirror*, 146.

[10] Alex García-Rivera, *St. Martín de Porres, The "Little Stories and the Semiotics of Culture"* (New York, Orbis Books, 1995), 29.

[11] Virgilio Elizondo, *Our Lady of Guadalupe as a Cultural Symbol*, in *Liturgy and Cultural Traditions* (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), 130-31. Quoted by García-Rivera, 29.

[12] Elizondo, *Our Lady*, 29.

[13] *Ibid.*

The Lady is interested in the pains and suffering of a people whom she wants to serve.

to the invaders. North and South had a new promise, not a "promised land" but the recovery of their dignity as human beings and children of God.

More and more studies on the semiotics of the culture related to the Lady of Guadalupe bring more light to the symbols of Juan Diego's vision. Juan Diego heard a peaceful music coming from the mountain followed by the voice of the Lady who spoke to him in Nahuatl, the language of the Indian, not in Spanish, the language of the oppressors. The voice expressed the intention of the Lady to communicate with the Indian people and her willingness to be with them, to live among them, to heal their pain and bring hope. The roses of the message to the Bishop grew in the mountain where only desert plants grew.[14] Voice, flowers, and music were the components of the first revelation of the Lady to the Indian and to the Bishop, who represented the dominant culture.

The miracle of the flowers happened when Juan Diego was looking for help for his *tío* (uncle) who was sick. The Lady told Juan Diego not to worry about him because she would cure him, which did happen. The semiotic of this miracle refers to the people, because in Spanish *tío* means people as well as uncle.[15] The promise of healing was for the whole people, not just for a particular ill person among the Indian population. Roberto S. Goizueta sees in the event of the Tepeyac an interrelation of the human action or "praxis."[16] This interaction is rooted in the human action or the life in the community.[17] The dialogue between Juan Diego and the Lady is not precisely an individualist western-oriented conversation but a communal dialogue between two persons who represent two dimensions of life and promise. The dialogue includes precious elements for the Latino people such as talking face to face, touching, flowers, music, and walking the way. The Lady makes clear to Juan Diego and in the message to the Bishop that she is not a goddess—she is the Mother of the True God. Thus, it was not a dialogue with merely one of the representatives of the gods or goddesses. This is a communal praxis in which the Lady is interested in the pains and suffering of a people whom she wants to serve. She was not interested in their liberation from the military and economic power of the invaders but in their conversion to a new people and a new world. There was no time frame nor dateline but rather a promise and concern of being with those *tíos* who suffered and needed healing.

Virgilio Elizondo introduces another dimension of the encounter in the Tepeyac. The semiotic again gives us symbols of interaction. Elizondo sees in the encounter a process which started in April, 1519,

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[14] Virgilio Elizondo, *Galilean Journey, The Mexican-American Promise* (New York: Orbis Books, 1983), 10.

[15] People can say *tío* for a person, without having blood relation, or one can say *tíos*, plural, for people—*esos tíos*-.

[16] Roberto S. Goizueta, *Caminemos con Jesús, Toward a Hispanic/Latino Theology of Accompaniment* (New York: Orbis Books, 1995), 77.

[17] *Ibid.*

when Hernán Cortés arrived in Mexico.[18] It was a process of an encounter between two races, two worlds, and two cultures. Twelve years later in the process the Lady becomes the Mother of *raza mestiza* (mixed clan, family, race or blood). The time, which started with *La Malinche*, an Indian Princess who became Cortés' wife and his language interpreter, came to its climax when the Lady talked to Juan Diego. The sacralization of the Indians and mestizos as human beings was declared in the encounter of the Tepeyac. The proclamation of the mestizaje as creation of God destroyed the violent imposition exercised by missionaries on the soul of Indians, the only place they could not conquer with the sword. The years of imposition of the Spanish culture, in spite of becoming free and independent from Spain later on, destroyed the way to return to preconquest patterns.[19] Elizondo adds that "The cultural clash of sixteenth-century Spain and Mexico was resolved and reconciled in the brown Lady of Guadalupe. In her the new mestizo people finds its meaning in its uniqueness, its unity."[20]

Another symbol of identification with the mestizo people was the color of her skin. She was brown, the color of Indian skin. That is why people call her even today "La Morenita," the brown Lady. Today one can walk inside churches and hear people say "She is like me, *morena*." People make a clear distinction between the Northern European imported saints and "La Morenita." In the radiant clothes, as Juan Diego saw the Lady, and in the tilma presented to the Bishop, one can see a black belt or waistband, the symbol of a pregnant woman. The pregnant woman is a symbol of the mestizaje inside of the Lady, and the delivery will be the freedom of those in slavery, Indians and mestizos, the birth of a new day, an eschatological dimension of the new race.

It is impossible to separate the issue of the historical proofs in the Tepeyac without considering the impact on the Latino people. Whether we have or do not have clear proof of the apparition in the Tepeyac, it will not destroy Our Lady of Guadalupe's influence on Latino spirituality. People can destroy all arguments about the historical presence of the Lady in the Tepeyac, but they cannot destroy the symbol, the devotion to her. This would repeat the actions of the conquerors, destroying the political, educational, and spiritual systems, yet they could not destroy their souls. Latino spirituality is not limited to the Juan Diego experience but is a communal spirituality which comes down through the centuries. It is not an individual experience such as the formula, "receive Jesus Christ as your personal Savior." This spirituality is preserved in the core of the community and its religious celebrations and experiences.

The Latino spirituality opens new fields for doing theology different from the traditional North Atlantic theology. The Lady of Guadalupe is an inspiration and a *locus theologicus* from the feminine point of view. C. Gilbert Romero talks about the Latino devotional as a symbol of pilgrimage.[21] This symbol belongs to the people and is present in celebrations in homes. People pray the rosary together with the whole family, every day, once a week, once a month. They pray in front of the home altar where there are many symbols of the family's pilgrimage; photographs, stones, statues of saints, rosaries, crucifixes, candles, books of prayers. Not everyone can understand those symbols because they belong to

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[18] Elizondo, *Galilean Journey*, 10.

[19] *Ibid.*, 10.

[20] *Ibid.*, 12.

[21] C. Gilbert Romero, *Hispanic Devotional Piety, Tracing the Biblical Roots* (New York, Orbis Books, 1991), 50.

a particular praying community. Only those who know the semiotic symbols will have the key for understanding such spirituality. In daily life no one can go all over the city and attend religious services from different confessions and be at home with all of them. Many times those symbols belong to the popular religion. They are not part of a system which the structure supports, such as the Bishop who received the news about Guadalupe. His first reaction was to reject the message because he believed that it was from "other indigenous gods." It was something pagan and sinful to deal with which did not deserve his precious time. The semiotic reveals to us something we cannot see at first. It is like water we drink but we do not know if it is good until the laboratory tells us whether it is pure or not.

Rosa Maria Icaza sees the Latino spirituality as a unity of faith and life. She says it would be irrelevant to preach a sermon among Latinos which does not continue their lives beyond the liturgical ceremony.[22] Inside the liturgical process or home devotions are "the sacredness of ancestral traditions."[23] These traditions do not belong to a liturgical book but to the community which worships in different places and times. The paradigm of the Virgin of Guadalupe runs through many of those traditions. Components of the Latino spiritual traditions are varied. Each region and country of Latin America can create its own symbols, celebrate its own saints, regional festivals, and celebrations. We can share an endless list of celebrations such as Posadas, Dia de los Muertos, Baptisms, Quinceañeras, Confirmations, Weddings, Rosaries, Noven-arios, Azahares (orange blossoms), Holy Week, Easter, and so on.

All these areas open new possibilities for doing theology from a particular locus. Our Lady of Guadalupe inspires a variety of topics regarding feminist theology.[24]

How do Lutherans feel when people start talking about a mission among Latinos in our neighborhood? First, people are concerned about the translation of our Lutheran confessions from Germany. Second, they wonder if "those people" know English as the official language of communication. Third, if "they" come to our church, where can we put them? In a room isolated from the sanctuary, they will have their own "community" and can talk their language. Many questions like that emerge in a planning committee on evangelism, which is why it is very difficult for Lutherans to attract people from other cultures to our churches. We need to be flexible and walk to the Tepeyac of our own spiritual experience. We cannot see the world merely from our own windows or preach the gospel through videos, tapes, or correspondence. The cultural drama is always there. Latinos or other people from different cultures are not a hard disk on our computers where we can erase from their souls all their spirituality and insert a new program. The Roman Catholic Church tried for five hundred years and came to the conclusion that it is impossible to change the Indian spirituality. The challenge to welcome, learn from, and incorporate Indian spirituality is still before us.

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[22] Rosa María Icaza, *Prayer, Worship, and Liturgy in the United States Hispanic Key,* in *Frontiers of Hispanic Theology in the United States*, ed. Allan Figueroa Deck (New York: Orbis Books, 1992), 135.

[23] *Ibid.*

[24] There are a number of good books in this area. The author recommends at least two important books: Jeanette Rodriguez, *Our Lady of Guadalupe, Faith and Empowerment among Mexican-American Women* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994). Ada María Isasi Díaz, *En la Lucha, In the Struggle Elaborating a Mujerista Theology* (Minneapolis, Fortress Press, 1993).

Liturgical Evangelism: From the Passions of Bach to the Passion of Rock

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J.S. Bach presents a paradigm for modern communication of the gospel through music, for Bach builds bridges of and for interaction between musicians and audiences. He does this in part by using familiar hymn tunes that not only *express* one text but that can *carry* many different texts. Unlike Handel who excluded hymns from his oratorios, Bach the populist interpolates chorales into his passions to "bring his audience onto the stage by old and familiar hymns."[1] Thus an interactive participation with the audience or congregation is facilitated. As the "fifth evangelist," Bach chooses what Routley calls the "folksongs of Lutheran pietism," namely hymns, to communicate the message of Christ crucified.[2] The chorus in the *St. Matthew Passion* draws the hearers into the disciples' question: "Is it I, Lord?" (*Herr, bin ich's?*). "It's I" (*Ich bin's*), the chorale continues, using Isaac's tune, LBW 282:

> It's I, I should suffer
> Bound hand and foot
> In Hell;
> The lashes and fetters
> And what you suffered—
> That has my soul deserved.
> (cf. *The Lutheran Hymnal* (TLH) 172, st. 5)

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[1] Eric Routley, *Church Music & the Christian Faith* (Carol Stream, IL: Agape, 1978), 42f. Routley presents Bach as the bridge between pietism and the neo-Pietism of the Romantic era, rather than simply between Orthodoxy and the classicism of the Rationalist age.

[2] Routley, 57f. Cf. Jaroslav Pelikan, *Bach Among the Theologians* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 39, citing Paul Minear's point that Bach saw the role of the interpreter as giving priority to the axis "between the events narrated and the contemporary audience whose members are called on to respond to those events in unqualified immediacy and with their whole being."

Then after the Sanhedrin condemns Jesus as deserving death, and the soldiers strike him and taunt him to identify his tormentor, the chorus sings:

> Who has thus struck thee,
> My salvation, and—with torments
> So evil—abused you?
> You are surely not a sinner
> Like us and our children;
> You know nothing of transgressions.
> (cf. TLH 171, st. 3)

Bach uses these stanzas taken from Paul Gerhardt's hymn to continue the theme introduced at the beginning of the *St. Matthew Passion* in Heermann's beloved "Ah, holy Jesus" ("Herzliebster Jesu," TLH 143; LBW 123). This summarizes Christ's suffering (TLH 143, st. 1 & 2) and personalizes human responsibility (TLH 143, st. 6 & 7; LBW 123, st. 2), as Bach both borrows and parallels Heermann's point in the hymn.

"Who was the guilty?"

The unpublished gospel rock musical by Jonathon Henry Anderson, *Most Excellent Theophilus* (discussed later in this essay), follows Bach's pattern, as Peter sings:

> As the dawn breaks,
> I have denied you!
> Fear of man has overcome me.

Then Judas confesses:

> With one kiss
> I betrayed your love, Lord!
> Love of money consumes my soul.

At the crucifixion Peter and Judas join in a duet:

> Fear breeds fear Lord
> I just can't stand it anymore:
> I have forsaken the very son of God.

The centurion Theophilus sings:

> In this dark hour,
> I crucified you —
> Following orders forced my hand.

Then the trio draws everyone onto the stage as the audience is invited to identify with the players:

> I've denied you!
> I have betrayed you!
> I crucified you!
>
> Oh my God,
> What have we done
> Abandoned you!
> For selfishness despises love.
> O my Lord,
> I hid my face from you.
> I cannot bear the thought
> Of your eyes upon me!

"All hail...!"

Bach, in the *St. Matthew Passion*, has yet another way to personalize the active confrontation with law and gospel. Words of respect become betrayal and mockery, "Hail: Rabbi" and "Hail, King of the Jews" ("Gegruesset seist du..."). These words of treachery and torture are inverted into praise of the crucified One: "O sacred head... I joy to call thee mine" (Gegruesset seist du mir = I hail you!) Hassler's love-song ("My mind is so confused") is transformed by Paul Gerhardt and harmonized by Bach to facilitate participation in a faith-response to Jesus as the stricken, rising Shepherd (TLH 172, st. 5). Tempted to betraying, denying, and forsaking Jesus like the disciples, the Christian too vows faithfulness in the face of Christ's suffering (TLH 172, st. 6). As Pilate marvels at Jesus' silence before his accusers, the chorus calls us to commit our ways to him as the one who rules nature. This time the chorale has no obvious connection with the text of Gerhardt's hymn. Rather it is an example of Bach using a familiar tune to carry an unfamiliar text. Immediately following the soldier's mock

hailing of the King of the Jews come the first two stanzas of "O Sacred Head," who is "full of blood and wounds, sorrow and scorn" and "derided with a crown of thorns," the once majestic face and shining eyes now pale and dim: to him are offered highest honor and adoration! (TLH 172, LBW 116, *Lutheran Worship* 113). The sixth and final appearance of "O Sacred Head" is immediately after Jesus' death, which draws us into contemplating the threat of our own dying, remembering that "the power of your anguish and pain rescues me from anguish" (cf. TLH 172, st. 9).

From the Reformation portrayals of the offices of Christ as Prophet, Priest and King, Bach chooses to focus the *St. Matthew Passion* on the prophetic role of Christ the Vicar. Representing both God and humanity, Christ the Prophet speaks and reveals the Word, and dies both *for* us and in our *place*. Pelikan calls this passion a meditation on Anselm's view of the cross as a vicarious satisfaction,[3] the view of the Atonement that dominated Protestant theology in the 17th century.

Refusing to let us skip too easily to the resurrection, Bach leaves us weeping repentant tears at the tomb, while at the same time singing "Mein Jesu, gute Nacht." We continue to sing to his worn-out body, "Rest quietly, quietly rest!" For his grave should also be *rest* to the anguished conscience and soul! The only mention of resurrection at the end of the Passion is from those who seek to foil a "Passover plot" by a seal and a watch.

"He's just a man!"

How, then, does Bach differ from the reflections of the sixties' death-of-God theologies in *Jesus Christ, Superstar* and *Godspell*? Andrew Lloyd Webber's *Superstar* is all too human ("He's a man—he's just a man! He's not a king..."). He is a rebel without a clear cause. Judas' question also seems to be Jesus' own question: "Who are you? What have you sacrificed?" Jesus appears an unwilling victim, not the Vicar of God who willingly bears the sin and death of the world. At best, Jesus is seen as a heroic human being, not God incarnate and crucified. Jesus may be hip and cool, but this adolescent uncertainty[4] and rage are his appeal. So Judas, like Mary Magdalene, cries: "I don't know how to love him!" Jesus' rage makes the cry "It is finished" sound like "I've had it." Moreover, the only one of the seven last words omitted by *Superstar* is the prayer of trust: "Father, into your hands, I commend my spirit." On the other hand, Judas' despairing rage, "I have been saddled with the murder of you... I have been used... you have murdered me...," sounds like "I've been had!"

And how about the absence of resurrection? Is Webber's *Superstar* any different from Bach? The wordless, poignant dirge that follows Jesus' death is entitled "John 19:41" ("Now in the place where he was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb where no one had ever been laid.") This is very different from Bach's lullaby, which awaits the Easter awakening. In the 20th anniversary London cast recording there are "new [1992] additional lyrics" by Tim Rice, entitled "Could We Start Again Please?" Is the resurrection "just a dream" or a reality "too frightening" to face? One 25th anniversary production had the cross flashing with lights after Jesus' death. Is that the "glory" of the cross or a hint of the resurrection? Is the tragic hero saluted or the crucified Lord

[3] Pelikan, *Bach*, 89-101.

[4] Richard Hawley, "Some Thought on the Pop Jesus," *Anglican Theological Review* 55:3 (1973), 343f.

resurrected?

By contrast to the tragedy of *Superstar*, *Godspell* is comedy—in the technical and sometimes the slapstick sense.[5] Ballads, folk, blues, rock, and a Broadway-style are the musical genres in which old texts—biblical and hymnic—are reworked. Unlike *Superstar*, they seldom carry the story along; rather they are used as vehicles for Jesus' teachings. Hawley suggests such instruction means "to delight the hell out of you."[6] But for all the playfulness, there is the suggestion of incarnation as Super*man* (not Super*star*), in "Prepare ye the way of the Lord." The hymn, "O bless the Lord, my soul," proclaims: "He pardons all thy sins... and ransoms thee from death." The affirmation of the crucified God in the chorus' response, "O God, you're dead," yields to the hope of resurrection in "Long live God." Such is the shape of Godspell's *divine* comedy; but until the end, Jesus seems mostly a comic clown.

"Nothing... except... Christ... crucified"

When Bach focuses the passions on the cross, he follows the lead of Paul in I Corinthians 1 & 2 in determining "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified." The cross is the *center* of Paul's letter, but not the *end (finis)*. In fact he spends the lengthy 15th chapter on the resurrection—Christ's and ours. Like John's Gospel, Bach sees the crucifixion as Christ's hour of "glorification," if not exaltation. This contrasts with those theologies (of glory?) that see Good Friday only as defeat and Easter alone as victory. Pelikan characterizes Bach's *St. John Passion* as a proclamation of Christ as Victor on Good Friday.[7]

The Victor is the counterpart of the office of Christ as King. Even without the Prologue of John 1, the glory of the incarnate Lord is heard in the opening chorus, "Herr, unser Herrscher"—almost impossible to render in English (usually "Lord, thou our Master"). The translational problem is intensified by the further description of Christ's renown as "herrlich" and the true and eternal Son of God as "verherrlicht." Perhaps we could translate: "Majesty, our most sovereign Majesty... whose fame is majestic..., you... will be magnified." If kingliness and not just deity are in view here, so also Jesus' response to Pilate about his "unworldly" kingdom evokes this choral response to the tune of Johann Crueger's *Herzliebster Jesus* ("Ah, Holy Jesu"):

> Ah, majestic King, great for all time,
> How can I proclaim thy faithfulness enough?

Finally, even Pilate is forced to proclaim, "Behold your King" and to write, "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews."

That the cross is seen as victory is made clear in the alto aria that follows Jesus' words, "It is finished": "The hero from Judah conquers with might and ends the fight." The bass then asks: "Am I from death set free?" The bowing of Jesus' head in death signs the silent answer, "Yes! Yes!" The chorus sees beyond the cross and sings: "Jesus, you who were dead, live now without end... you who have atoned for me... give me only what you have won." Then the tenor's heart cries out that "the whole world in Jesus' sufferings likewise suffers." The soprano, "With tears overflowing," announces: "Thy Jesus is dead!" How is it that the soloists are still stuck on Good Friday and the chorus prays to the risen Lord?

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[5] Ralph W. Quere, "Superstar and Godspell," *dialog* 12 (Summer 1973) 221-23.

[6] Hawley, "...Pop Jesus," 343.

[7] Pelikan, *Bach*, 104-115.

Like John's Gospel, Bach sees the crucifixion as Christ's hour of "glorification."

Narrative criticism can help us see what Bach is doing here. Critics draw a distinction between the author, the narrator—the "I" in Luke's Gospel who interviewed the eyewitnesses and who wrote an "orderly account" of the *story* of Jesus for a person named Theophilus. There may be a distinction between the implied author of Luke-Acts, viz. Luke, and the real author who is anonymous. The implied readers are those who read over the shoulders of Theophilus or borrow or overhear the narrative. There are also the real readers—whether late first-century Syrian or twentieth-century American congregations.

This narrative structure has a parallel in what Bach is doing in the passions: the evangelists, John or Matthew, simply recite the biblical text and thus function as narrators, while the soloists sing the words of Jesus, the disciples and their enemies; the "narratee," viz. Theophilus, listens without comment, but the "implied readers" are like Bach's soloists, who are outside observers—who overhear and sometimes overreact to the narrative—just like the disciples. *The chorus in Bach represents the real readers and is the bridge to the audience/ congregation. This is the vehicle for the interaction that brings the audience "onto the stage."* Unlike the outside observer/ soloists, the chorus in the chorales does know the rest of the story and sees clearly beyond the tomb.

Thus the lullaby of the chorus that ends the *St. John Passion* is addressed to the dead Jesus, praying that he "rest well," knowing that his grave opens heaven and closes hell for us. The final chorale is petition and praise:

> So then from death awaken me
> So that my eyes may see thee
> In fullness of joy, O Son of God,
> My Savior and my throne of grace!
> Lord Jesus Christ, hear me,
> Oh hear Thou me
> I will Thee praise eternally!

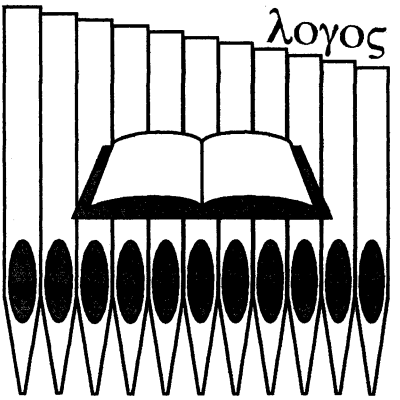
One last glimpse of the victorious King who has defeated sin, death and the devil—closing hell and opening heaven—is seen in the image of Jesus as "my throne of grace" ("Gnadenthron,") presumably a reference to Hebrews 4:16, but here personalized in Jesus himself as the locus of sovereign mercy for the world.[8]

Rocking the gospel today

"Liturgical evangelism"[9] in the 90s is often used to describe alternate styles of contem-

[8] Earlier, when Jesus had stood before Pilate, the chorus had sung: "Through your imprisonment, Son of God, has come our freedom. Your dungeon is the throne of grace...." Like Luther's translation of propitiation/expiation (*hilasterion*: the mercy-seat of the Ark of the Covenant) in Rom 3:25 as *Gnadenstuhl*, so a Protestant artist in the 16th century created a Protestant *Pieta*, portraying God the Father holding the body of the dead Jesus and entitling it *Gnadenstuhl*. Whether as Victor or Victim, God's merciful grace is embodied in the crucified Lord of glory.

[9] Robert E. Webber, *Liturgical Evangelism: Worship as Outreach and Nurture* (Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse, 1986), 1: "Liturgical evangelism calls a person into Christ and the church through a conversion regulated and ordered by worship. These



porary worship designed for the "seeker." In form and context, this is not unlike the songs, prayers and Scripture readings of a Billy Graham crusade, or a Billy Sunday revival or a Charles Finney camp meeting on the frontier. The Western liturgy in its Roman Catholic, Episcopal or Lutheran forms has evangelistic power because of the Word its words bear.[10] When joined with music—depending on the difficulty of the setting and how "user-friendly" its form and presentation are—the encounter with the living Word can, humanly speaking, either be facilitated or frustrated. However, the Holy Spirit is free and will not be blocked, or even forced, by our efforts. We need to remove unnecessary barriers and certainly "offenses"—as much as humanly possible. One of the strengths of the sung liturgy is the possibility of participation by the worshippers, including visiting "seekers." This will obviously vary with musical gifts and tastes. As a realistic compromise between worship needs of God's people and their evangelistic outreach, the integrity of liturgical texts should be maintained and seekers' services designed with any music that parishioners like and can sing: blues, folk, rock, or country. There are plenty of new settings available!

Bach's passions provide the paradigm of a different kind of liturgical evangelism. Performed Good Friday afternoon, his passion did not take the place of the regular liturgy. His passions have roots in medieval passion plays, in the dramatic passions of the 16th century, and in the budding operas of the 18th century. These provided the historical and cultural justification for Bach's endeavors. Like opera, Bach's passions regularly used recitative (rooted in plainsong chant) for the evangelist and for most of the words sung by Jesus, the disciples and their enemies. Sometimes the replies are melodic. The arias of the outside observers are melodic songs, as are many of the chorus parts. Other chorus parts are familiar hymns, usually reharmonized by Bach, in altered meters, usually more isometric than the original. The important point is that the hymn tunes were familiar—"the folk-tunes of Lutheran pietism." The secular roots of "O Sacred Head" as a love-song undoubtedly increased familiarity. That it could be readapted as a protest-song in the 60s, "Because All Men are Brothers," shows its flexibility; i.e. good tunes can "carry" many texts. This differs from the Romantic notion that a tune must precisely express one text only. Some scholars argue that the congregation may have sung along with the chorus in these hymns; at least, some would have hummed along.

To the principle of familiarity must be added a principle of viability. It is my own observation and conviction that if people know either the text or the tune of a hymn,

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services order the inner experiences of repentance from sin, faith in Christ, conversion of life, and entrance into the Christian community."

[10] Ralph W. Quere, "Worship and Evangelism," *Augsburg Resource Cassette*, Series 5, No. 5.

they are more tolerant about learning the other part. For example, people may prefer the familiar tune of "Amazing Grace," but they will try a new one. If both tune and text are new—and difficult—one can hear and almost feel vibrations of hymnal slammings. The familiar made viable by simplicity, by a choir "modeling" a stanza, or by song leaders facilitating an interactive participation, helps communicate the message.

Familiarity and viability come not only from favorite tunes but also from beloved *styles* of music, whether Baroque, Classical or Romantic in its classic, folk, blues, rock, or country varieties. The kind of music one likes helps communicate, on both intellectual and emotional levels, the message embodied and expressed in it. Even if one who prefers classical music finds certain kinds of rock and country neither familiar, understandable, nor likeable, most people today react thus to most classical music! Church musicians need to be more willing and able to compromise on tunes while maintaining the integrity of the texts. Church members need to be more willing and ready to compromise the beloved "old" hymns (usually meaning 19th century Romantic hymns of the Victorian era rather than classic Lutheran chorales) in favor of the equally Romantic twentieth century music of today. This compromise is needed to keep and reach today's "youth," including baby boomers in their 30s and 40s.

Rock Gospel according to Theophilus

What Lutherans have long understood about participation in worship via hymnody and liturgy has been rediscovered by Roman Catholics since Vatican II. What Lutherans need to discover from the experience of Baptists and Methodists in the 18th and 19th century revivals and from today's evangelicals and pentecostals is the *evangelistic potential of music in reaching those outside the church and the faith.* We cannot repristinate and repeat what Bach did, but as he borrowed from the modern opera, so *church musicians can borrow not only contemporary music forms but musical* drama *as well. The rock opera or musical can become a* medium *for the means of grace, whether using the media of stage, screen, or recording.*

An example of this new evangelistic model for youth and families is the musical *Most Excellent Theophilus.* A team of youth and adults related to the seminary communities of Dubuque wrote the script. A cast, ages 12-52, performed it locally and at the National Lutheran Youth Gathering in Atlanta (1994). A recently produced and published sequel, *Prodigal*, was scheduled for performance at the 1997 Youth Gathering in New Orleans. *Theophilus* and *Prodigal* are examples of what is being done and can be utilized and emulated locally.[11]

Most Excellent Theophilus is Luke's Gospel in a New Revised Non-Standard Version. It attempts to tell Jesus' story using contemporary images, examples, metaphors and slang without losing the once-for-all, universal meaning of his death and resurrection. Like Bach's St. John Passion, *Theophilus* begins with Jesus' Lordship, announcing the incarnation in rap. The shepherds encounter a young Roman soldier, Theophilus, and relate the angels' birth announcement of Christ the Lord, "you know, a King of kings and Lord of lords, like the emperor."

The angels' *Gloria* parallels "peace on earth" with the crowd's shout of "peace in

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[11] Script and music for *Most Excellent Theophilus* and *Prodigal* are available from the Center for Youth Ministries, Wartburg Seminary, Dubuque, IA 52003.

heaven" on Palm Sunday. In the temptation scene, Satan promises to keep the "little baking secret" of the rocks hot enough to bake pizza if Joshua (the name by which Jesus is called) will make bread. He even offers, like Dostoevsky's?? Grand Inquisitor, the lure of "no more poor, no more hungry, no more sick." Jesus rejects the temple stunt (without a bungee chord) by saying, "Don't play games with God!"

The writers of *Theophilus* made Jesus' "mission statement" in Nazareth the criterion for the events selected from Luke's Gospel: (1) preaching good news to the poor, (2) proclaiming release to captive prisoners, (3) healing the blind, and (4) setting free victims broken by oppression. They selected the following stories: healing the centurion's dying servant (Lk 7:1ff.), absolving the sinner woman (Lk 7:36ff.), feeding the 5,000 (Lk 9:10ff.), healing the blind man enroute to Jerusalem (Lk 18:35ff. —by dramatic license placed in the Temple). But the central outworking of Jesus' mission is focused on the liberation effected by his victory on the cross. Satan confronts "Joshua" with a last temptation in the taunt: "If you're God's Son... our king, jump down, King Josh." Josh responds to the tempter as he did in the initial temptation: "Jump back, you devil. You've lost. I've won. You're done!" Remembering back to that Bethlehem night long ago, the centurion Theophilus cries out in anguish, wondering whether he has killed that holy "Lord" of whom the shepherds spoke. Satan in jubilation cries out: "He's dead! He's lost. I've won! He's done!" In a final confrontation on Easter, Josh proves Satan's boast false. Joshua brings Theophilus to see that, like the prodigal son, though lost, he has been found; though unworthy, he is forgiven; though dead, he has been made alive. And to the audience Josh says, "Peace is yours. Just believe!"

The shortcoming of *Jesus Christ, Superstar* lies in its failure to present incarnation, atonement and resurrection; its strength lies in asking the right questions about Christ's person ("Who are you?") and work ("What have you sacrificed?") If *Godspell* assumes—without proclaiming—the saving death and resurrection of God-in-the-flesh, its weakness lies in "playing" church when the church lives under the cross. Perhaps because of that, *Godspell*' s message is less the good news of the word of the cross than the bad news of the law's demand. The passions of Bach provide a model of proclamation and response to the word of the cross. Reflecting on the music and words of Bach's passions can give us criteria for evaluating and producing contemporary musical presentations of the gospel. Moreover, Bach is a faithful guide in communicating the gospel. This new hybrid of Bach's passions and the passion of *Superstar's* tragic rock opera and *Godspell*' s folk-rock musical comedy can become a vehicle for the message of Christ crucified and risen.

Familiarity of musical forms helps the church meet people where they are: that constitutes its viability. Interactive participation personalizes the experience of guilt and the response of faith by helping us identify with characters of the musical drama. The chorus, as for Bach, can be the bridge to the audience, mirroring contemporary reactions and pointing beyond reaction to revelation of new meaning and fresh hope. It is not that the medium is to become the message but that the media of drama and music can become media/means of grace. Like preaching, musical drama can be Word of God if it communicates law and gospel. Like the passion plays and the dramatic, oratorio, or opera passions, contemporary musical drama can be that new form of "liturgical evangelism" that can reach out and proclaim good news to the unreached!

Book Reviews

Ministry and Theology in Global Perspective: Contemporary Challenges for the Church. Edited by Don A. Pittman, Ruben L. F. Habito and Terry C. Muck. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996. xii and 524 pages. Paper. $35.00.

This is an excellent textbook for theological students who are interested in the area of contemporary missiology, especially in relation to other religions. The book is compiled by three theological educators representing three major Christian communities of Roman Catholics, evangelicals and mainline Protestants. The editors take global aspects of theologies and theological education seriously and take the well-being of the "spaceship Earth" as an essential concern of theologies. The editors profoundly express their Christian concern and sense of responsibility of caring for the ecological health of the earth, seeing the interdependent nature of human life on earth beyond the welfare and security of a nation. The book, therefore, calls Christians to strive toward the establishment of a "Kin-dom form of spirituality" testifying to human sinfulness, failed stewardship of the earth, and lack of concern for others.

The book has three major parts. The first part deals with the theology of religions and explores different ways of understanding and relating to other world religions by Christian theologians in the past and present; the second part deals with new definitions and understandings of mission and missionaries; and the final part deals with the importance of dialogue in Christian ministry. Each part of the book includes introductory essays by the editors and useful resources and texts of important theologians.

The value of the book rests in providing these resources of theological statements, especially of those so-called third world theologians who are not well known in the western world today. However, the contents of the book lack any creative new thoughts or insights. The book is the result of a labor of love to be helpful to theological students providing outlines, questions, and resources in the area of contemporary missiology.

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In the Embrace of God: Feminist Approaches to Theological Anthropology. Edited by Ann O'Hara Graff. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1995. vi and 234 pages. Paper. $19.00.

Growing out of eight years of conversation in the Catholic Theological Society, *In the Embrace of God* is an anthology of essays by individuals knitted together for a common purpose: to define and elucidate how women's experience illumines both theology and anthropology, especially the combination of the two as theological anthropology.

The introduction spotlights the book's purpose and methodology. O'Hara Graff defines theological anthropology as the mingled relationship of theology (words about God) and anthropology (words about human beings). The study begins with two assertions: human beings are fundamentally within God's embrace, and human beings are essentially social creatures immersed in and participating in community.

Part I, "The Framework," consists of two clarion articles by Mary Ann Zimmer and Mary Ann Hinsdale. These essays provide critical reflection on the texture, the goals, and the methods of feminism. Here the reader encounters why feminism in general and feminist theological anthropology in particular are issues of justice, not only for women but for anyone who is subjugated and disdained.

Part II, "Foundations in Experience," begins to articulate the specific geographical, cultural, and linguistic contexts which women experience. O'Hara Graff writes about the neces-

sity of women's experience in making known the limits of malestream (mainstream + male) theology. This malestream theology, although it may claim to be universal, cannot speak for women; likewise, women of one context (white women, for example) cannot speak for all women. Two essays, by Maria Pilar Aquino and Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, specify and elaborate on the Latina and mujerista contexts for theological anthropology.

Part III, "Explorations in Experience," is by far the most eclectic section of the book. Authors in this section look toward a variety of disciplines—feminist psychologies, liberation theologies, theologies of sexuality—to augment the breadth of the vision of women's experiences. Part IV, "Experience and Specific Theological Issues," tackles the issues of sin, ecofeminism, and the prickly topic of the image of God. These four essays piece together a vision where women and the earth are no longer harmed by a hierarchy of worth, authority, and domination.

This book is a helpful and multi-disciplinary volume that describes all earthly inhabitants as one diverse community, whose members can learn from one another. With the help of books like this, women's experiences can be heard and can become foundations for new theological partnerships and dialogue. Women's experiences are crucial in forming a theological anthropology in which men and women can dissolve the barnacles of prejudice on the basis of gender.

Bonnie Flessen
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Jesus Christ in the Preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher. By Dawn DeVries. Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996. x and 114 pages. Cloth. $15.00.

What impact did historical criticism have on Protestant Christian preaching? Was there a difference in the way precritical and postcritical preachers proclaimed Christ? Dawn DeVries addresses these questions by exploring the importance of the Jesus of history for the preaching of Calvin and Schleiermacher. The aim of her study is to demonstrate: "It is the Christ present in the proclaimed Word (the *Christous praesens*) that is at the center of both Calvin's and Schleiermacher's preaching" (ix).

Chapter 1 sets the context for this study in terms of the christological issues raised by historical criticism, as well as the neo-orthodox criticism of Schleiermacher's theology of the Word. Chapter 2 explores Calvin's understanding of Word as sacrament. Chapter 3 analyzes Calvin's sermons on the synoptic Gospels, asking how the notion of Christ present in the proclaimed Word affected his preaching of Christ. Chapters 4 and 5 focus on Schleiermacher's theology of the Word and his preaching on Gospel texts. Chapter 6 draws comparisons between Calvin and Schleiermacher, noting their similar understandings of the Word of God and the task of preaching, and their differences in relating the doctrines of the sacramental Word and the work of Christ. The chapter concludes by suggesting the fruitfulness of the notion of the sacramental Word for the contemporary task of preaching.

DeVries' own intention for this volume is to provide insight into the theologies of Calvin and Schleiermacher, and the doctrinal development of the Protestant tradition. As a preacher and teacher of preachers, I find it thought-provoking in other areas as well. The book offers and impetus for reflection about the relationship between biblical criticism and the task of preaching, and the theology of preaching and the notion of Word as sacrament. Implicitly, the book asks an important question of contemporary preachers: How do *your* sermons reflect and reveal your understanding of Jesus Christ?

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The God of Israel and Christian Theology. By R. Kendall Soulen. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. xii and 195 pages. Paper. $17.00.

Professor Soulen presents in this volume both a careful critique of the inherent supersessionism within Christianity and a tenacious proposal for purging it. Beginning with the non-negotiable, "the God of the Hebrew Scriptures acted in Jesus of Nazareth for all the world" (1; 109) and the understanding that "supersessionism is a specifically theological problem because it threatens to render the existence of the Jewish people a matter of indifference to the God of Israel" (4), Soulen proposes a fresh, Bible-oriented theological matrix out of which to view the God of Israel, Jesus the Christ, and the relationship between Christianity and Judaism.

The major shift which he proposes in the focus of this matrix is from the traditional economy of redemption to an economy of consummation, which he describes as "an economy of mutual blessing between those who are and who remain different" (111). He argues that Christianity suffers from a latent semi-gnosticism of history (i.e., Old Testament–New Testament) whereby Christianity has lost its biblical orientation especially in regard to the Hebrew Scriptures relying, rather, on what he calls the "standard canonical narrative." This canonical narrative is the Christian framework for reading scripture which highlights God's work as redeemer alone with Christ as the focus of both testaments ultimately removing the gospel from its proper context and resulting in "an evisceration of the God of Israel in Christian theology" (55).

Divided into two major sections, the first provides a guided tour through the development of this canonical narrative throughout Christian history. In the early apologetic work of Justin Martyr and Irenaeus, Soulen places the root of supersessionism in the belief that the church became the new spiritual Israel replacing the old, carnal Israel making the Hebrew Scriptures largely irrelevant. He then moves to a discussion of the blatant supersessionist theology of Kant and Schleiermacher, who attempt to dissolve the connection between the God of Christianity and the God of Israel altogether by initiating a process of "de-Judaization" within Christian theology (78). His tour ends with a critique of the attempts by Barth and Rahner to overcome the standard canonical narrative. According to Soulen, their attempts ultimately fail because they fail to address its roots in supersessionism. This section makes-up for its lack of breadth in the depth of understanding of the development and deep-seated nature of supersessionism within the Christian Tradition.

Part two provides the reader with an engaging and challenging proposal for overcoming the reliance on the canonical narrative and, thus, supersessionism itself. Soulen accomplishes this by shifting the ultimate paradigm of the divine economy from one of redemption to one of consummation. His proposal in short is: "Christians should acknowledge that God's history with Israel and the nations is the permanent and enduring medium of God's work as the Consummator of human creation, and therefore it is also the permanent and enduring context of the gospel about Jesus" (110). God's work as Redeemer, though essential, is penultimate in that "God acts in fidelity to God's work as Consummator by refusing to let curse have the last word" (148). The economy of mutual blessing between God and God's people, between Israel and the nations is the ultimate purpose of the economy of blessing. Throughout this section Soulen maintains a christocentrism that ultimately places his conclusions somewhere outside of pluralism.

This book will prove challenging and, hopefully, a bit disturbing to the professor and parish pastor alike, for it is not often that the Church is reminded of its largely Gentile nature. This study proves radical in the true sense of the word probing the roots of the Christian faith and the problem of supersessionism.

Samuel D. Giere
Wartburg Theological Seminary

Life Together/Prayerbook of the Bible. By Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Translated from the German Edition edited by Gerhard Müller and Albrecht Schönherr. English Edition edited by Geffrey B. Kelly. Translated by Daniel W. Bloesch and James H. Burtness. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, volume 5. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1996. xiv and 218 pages. Cloth. $30.00.

Life Together and *Prayerbook of the Bible*, two classics of Christian spirituality written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor and theologian who was martyred by the Nazis in 1945, are appearing together in print for the first time. This volume is the first to be published in Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (DBWE), a scholarly English edition of the new German critical edition of Bonhoeffer's writings. *Act and Being* (DBWE 2) has also been published. One or two volumes will be published per year until all 17 have been completed. Volumes 1-8 are fresh translations of books previously published in English. Volumes 9-16 are collections of letters, essays, sermons, and other shorter writings organized in eight successive chronological time periods from 1918-1945. Much of this material has never been available in English. Volume 17 will be an index volume. Readers of DBWE will appreciate the extensive editorial apparatus, the concerted effort to maintain consistency of translation throughout the series, and the employment of gender-inclusive language inasmuch as this is "possible without distorting Bonhoeffer's meaning or disassociating him from his own time" (viii). A significant improvement to *Life Together* is the inclusion of Bonhoeffer's original preface.

Life Together has had a significant impact on a wide variety of Christian congregations and communities ever since it was first published in English in 1954. To a large extent it was inspired by the "life together" of Bonhoeffer and his students at the illegal preachers' seminary at Finkenwalde. When the Gestapo finally shut this seminary down in late 1937, Bonhoeffer felt compelled to publish his thoughts on Christian community. He views *Life Together* as one contribution to the church's responsibility to explore what the Holy Scriptures teach us concerning "life together under the Word" (27). The thematic chapters of *Life Together* offer a fruitful structure for a study of Christian community: Community, The Day Together, The Day Alone, Service, and Confession and the Lord's Supper. I have also used the chapter on Christian service as the basis for a series of Lenten meditations on the various ministries or services which are crucial to the well-being of a Christian community.

In *Prayerbook of the Bible* Bonhoeffer identifies the Psalms as a "priceless treasure" (161) of the church for teaching us how to pray. The use of the Psalms for personal and communal prayer was a vital part of Bonhoeffer's own life and of life together at the Finkenwalde seminary. Bonhoeffer classifies the Psalms according to these themes: creation, law, the history of salvation, the Messiah, the church, life, suffering, guilt, enemies, and the end. One might question whether all of the Psalms are, strictly speaking, prayers. It is probably more accurate to describe the Psalms as the "hymnbook of the Bible." Nonetheless, the Psalms are, as Bonhoeffer clearly recognized, a valuable resource for cultivating and renewing our personal and communal prayer life.

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Preaching Helps

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost—Thanksgiving Day
Series B

No Ordinary Time, No Ordinary People

Reading about the Revised Common Lectionary, I keep bumping into references to "Ordinary Time" and such relatively new (to me) entities as "Proper 9" and "Proper 20." Here is my understanding (and quite possibly my misunderstanding) of the situation. Until the reforms carried out in the Roman Catholic Church in 1969, the language "Ordinary Time" simply did not exist as a liturgical term. It was common to celebrate the Sundays after Epiphany and the Sundays after Pentecost as constituting discrete seasons in the Church Year: the "Season of Epiphany" and "the Season of Pentecost."

Now some speak of the Sundays "after Epiphany" and the Sundays "after Pentecost" as belonging to "Ordinary Time," and they tell us this language is not intended to downgrade those Sundays. No, no! The exact opposite is their intention. Sundays after Epiphany together with Sundays after Pentecost should not be viewed as existing in the shadow of the two great festivals but as constituting a distinct portion of the Church Year all their own. All these Sundays celebrate the mystery of Jesus Christ as the manifestation of God in our world.

However reassuring these explanations may be, I still think we need a better name than "Ordinary Time" for this long post-Epiphany and post-Pentecost season. Liturgical scholars assure us (in my case I am afraid in vain) that "ordinary" does not bear its ordinary meaning. "Ordinary," they say, is liturgical language for "Sundays that are counted and calculated" as in the phrase "ordinal numbers." The cardinal numbers are "one, two, three." The "ordinals" are "first, second, third" and so forth. Furthermore, I am told, we need to consider these 33 or 34 weeks with their Sundays as a coherent unity consisting of two parts (post-Epiphany and post-Pentecost) dedicated to reading the Gospel for the year in consecutive fashion, giving us the opportunity to devote ourselves to what it is that each of the Gospels reveals to us about the Christ and what the Christ reveals to us about humanity and God.

So we are not to imagine that other Sundays are wonderful while Sundays in

"Ordinary Time" are colorless or pale! But the damage is done nonetheless. At least in my case the language of "Ordinary Time" fails to set up any ringing and echoing in the soul.

Certainly we can all agree that no Sunday is an ordinary day in the ordinary sense of the word "ordinary." Every Sunday is "the Lord's Day," a celebration of creation's first dawning with its gifts of light and breath, a little Easter full of joy and the presence of Christ now risen from the dead, a powerful foretaste of the coming *basileia* as Christ responds to our prayer, "Come, Lord Jesus!" Every Sunday is an extraordinary day, and it is a great gift whenever it happens that we experience Sunday as the Christian sabbath, the Lord's day, a day for stepping out of the ordinary, for cracking open our imaginations, for punctuating the secularity and profanity of our days and hours with a burst of transcendence and holiness.

Helping us to do just that are the words of **Paul Bodin**, campus pastor at Pacific Lutheran Theological Seminary. Paul arrived at PLTS in the fall of 1994 after serving parishes on both coasts (New York and the state of Washington). I have come to know Paul as a careful reader of biblical texts and an equally careful reader of people. And when I need help with my computer, I ring up Paul, who always knows more than I need to hear! Paul has contributed the First Readings for these days. And in a sense he contributed his co-author in this issue. She once interned at Our Saviour Lutheran Church on Staten Island, New York, when Paul was pastor there. Paul suggested her as a writer for these pages.

The Pastoral Reflections are the work of **Laura Leach Shreffler**, pastor of St. Paul Lutheran Church in rural Darke County, Ohio. Her husband Ron Shreffler is also a pastor, serving in Greenville, Ohio. They are the parents of Rebecca, three and a half. The rural churches of Darke County are struggling with their prophetic role as more and more agricultural land is eaten up, and huge corporate farms are threatening the traditional family farmer. Laura, a graduate of Trinity Lutheran Seminary in Columbus, was a journalist for nine years before entering seminary, running the gamut from sports writer to managing editor.

C. S. Lewis somewhere wrote that we have never met "an ordinary person." There is no such critter. Every human being is quite extraordinary. I thank the two extraordinary writers who have taken time from their schedules to contribute words and images to help all the rest of us proclaim God's grace in the final weeks of the "Extraordinary Time" we call Pentecost.

Pentecostally Yours,

Robert H. Smith
Editor of Preaching Helps

Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 21 September 28, 1997

Psalm 19:7-14
Numbers 11:4-6, 10-16, 24-29
James 5:13-20
Mark 9:38-50

First Reading

A careful reading of the Gospel pericopes appointed for the next several Sundays will discern that Jesus is teaching about the character of God's sovereignty. The central thrust of this teaching is a presentation of the qualities that typify God's desires for those who wish to follow where God calls. It is notable that this section is bracketed by Jesus' second and third prediction of his passion, and in each case his prediction of betrayal and suffering is followed by a controversy among the disciples about rank.

When Jesus answers John's spiteful complaint we expect perhaps a pithy saying about true faithfulness and dedication. Instead Jesus sums up his response with the dictum, "Whoever is not against us is for us." The context is shaped by the argument among the disciples about who was the greatest, which receives its definitive answer later in Mark 10:45. Jesus' immediate response, though, is in verses 35-37 just before our pericope; clearly the true followers of Jesus are serious about serving all, and must be concerned to welcome even the inconsequential as they would welcome God.

Abruptly John speaks up with his concern about unsanctioned claimants to Jesus' authority. In an interesting echo of Moses' rebuke of Joshua in Numbers 11:29, Jesus disabuses John of any pretensions to sole possession of Jesus' name. We can almost hear the echo of Moses' voice, "Would that all the Lord's people were prophets." Jesus then turns right back to the previous concern with the least, the little ones, the inconsequential. John was concerned with circumscribing the extent of God's reign, while Jesus was concerned with extending it to include all who would hear.

This concern with service to all and careful welcome to the least places the final verse in an unexpected light: "Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another." Salt is valued for its salty character, without which it has no worth. In the same way those who believe in Jesus exhibit a unique character, typified by the welcome extended to those who are of no worldly consequence, by concern for the weak and by service to all. That this salt is a fiery salt reminds us that the service Jesus has in mind involves suffering as well as sacrifice. Jesus' followers thus extend the pattern of Jesus' own life and character. Those who do not display this characteristic have lost the true flavor of God's sovereign rule. PB

Pastoral Reflections

Whiners. We all know them. At times, we even *are* them. Never happy. Always something to fret about or be depressed about. Picking about the least little thing. Unable to be grateful or thankful that they can eat or breathe or put one foot in front of the other.

It's hard to lead whiners and maintain your enthusiasm. Ask any teachers today. I know for several years, any mention of homework or—God forbid—memorization in catechism has resulted in whining and shocked looks as if "memorize" were a four-letter word. Then those of us who are pastors get together and whine about our catechism students whining and whine about all the memory work we used to do—without whining.

Moses had the misfortune to be leading some champion whiners. This group was always whining about food. They had food

every day—the same food, to be sure, but it was food. Now they craved meat. "We remember the fish we used to eat in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions and the garlic—but now there is nothing at all but this manna." It was a bland diet; they wanted some variety. We all can identify with that. After a three-day liquid diet following my daughter's birth, I didn't care if I never saw another tray full of juice, broth and Jell-O again. When we get bored with anything, it's easy to forget that we're blessed; it's easy to whine.

And yet, I identify with Moses as well. Like Moses, many pastors try to take on too much themselves. Then, like Moses, we whine to God, "Did I give birth to these whiners, God? Do I have to carry them in my bosom to the Promised Land? If this is what it's going to be like, then take me now, Lord." God's answer? A church council of 70. God will give God's Spirit to 70 elders, and Moses will learn to delegate.

God's Spirit also rests on Eldad and Medad, who had decided to stay in camp, not go to the tent of meetings. Moses' right-hand man, Joshua, is the *last* person we would expect to whine. "Moses, these guys are prophesying. Make them stop."

Moses refuses. "Are you jealous for my sake? Would that all the Lord's people were prophets and that the Lord would put his spirit on them!"

"He's not one of us. Make him stop." This spirit is echoed thousands of years later by the disciples. John tells Jesus that the twelve had seen someone casting out demons in Jesus' name, and they tried to stop him because "he's not one of us." And Jesus replies, "Whoever is not against us is for us." John wanted the man stopped because he was not following the disciples, not because he was not following Jesus. He wasn't playing by the rules. The religious leaders of Jesus' day had the same complaint. Jesus was not one of them. He was not playing by their rules.

Neither Jesus nor Moses allow their followers to control the Word of God. That kind of behavior, Jesus says, sets up a stumbling block. If those of us who take too much pride in being lifelong Lutherans or lifelong Christians or lifelong members of the same congregation set that pride as a stumbling block to those new Christians still infants in the faith, then, Jesus says, it would be better for us to have a millstone hung around our necks and for us to be thrown into the sea.

I serve at a church where almost everyone is related and almost everyone can trace roots back to the handful of German immigrants who founded the church 116 years ago. We also have "new people" at our church who may have been members 20 or 30 years. Although we've welcomed our new members here with open arms, their ideas had better be running a parallel track with the "established" members. Does this sound familiar?

We do not dictate where God's spirit rests. All of us—Lutherans, Christians, unbelievers—are standing in the need of God's grace. We also are responsible for giving grace. Christian acts can be, and often are, done by people who are "not our kind." Let us embrace that fact, not whine about it. Would that all the Lord's people were prophets! LLS

Twentieth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 22 October 5, 1997

Psalm 8
Genesis 2:18-24
Hebrews 1:1-4; 2:5-12
Mark 10:2-16

First Reading

Last Sunday's Gospel pericope pointedly excluded Jesus' saying about the little child; this Sunday the little children provide the climax.

As this pericope stands, it is a brief drama in three scenes. The theme of the drama seems to be the family, for the dialog at center stage features marriage and children. The central tension, though, is provided by the contrast between Jesus' gentleness and his opponents' hardness of heart. While Jesus' words about divorce sound harsh to modern ears, the only true harshness is directed at those who fail to recognize the pain and suffering that result when God's original intention for human relationships fails.

In the opening scene some Pharisees come to test Jesus as he is teaching the gathered crowds. Believing that they know the right answer, they ask Jesus the question about divorce: is it lawful? First Jesus turns the question around, asking what Moses commanded. When the Pharisees provide their answer Jesus has a quick rejoinder; he quotes Moses to them, a passage fresh in our minds from hearing the first lesson and clearly familiar to all present. Although Moses permitted divorce, Moses himself wrote that God's original intention was that two people should become one in marriage. Furthermore Jesus adds the admonition, "What God has joined together, let no one separate." Jesus characterizes Moses' permission of divorce as an allowance for human hardness of heart.

In the next scene, alone with the disciples, Jesus explains his reasoning. When one spouse divorces another it is a harm to the other, which Jesus characterizes as "adultery." Only hardness of heart will allow anybody to inflict such a wound lightly.

One of Mark's characteristic abrupt transitions shifts to the third scene when the arrival of people bringing children to Jesus sets the stage for our climax. The disciples, with the same hardness of heart for which Jesus chided the Pharisees, would deny them. Jesus' indignation betrays his own gentle heart. Whereas the people had hoped only for Jesus to touch the little children, he actually takes them up in his arms and blesses them. Whatever Jesus means by the saying, "Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it," his statement that God's realm belongs to such helpless little ones is clear. PB

Pastoral Reflections

One of my favorite comic strips is "For Better or for Worse." I think I like this comic strip because it's so real—even the kids get one year older each year.

One Sunday several years ago, in the comic strip, the main characters, Elly and John, are hiking, with an infant April in the backpack. Elly sees an elderly couple ahead of them. They hold hands and look into each other's eyes as if they've been married five days and not fifty years. "Look at that," Elly says to John, laughing. "Isn't that a riot?" "I don't know," John replies. "I was kind of hoping that would be us someday."

My husband asked me if I had seen the strip. We had been married a year at that time. When I said I had, he said, "And I was hoping that will be us someday."

When we repeat those marriage vows, all of us hope that someday we will be that

older couple, still in love after all those years. But we live in a broken world, and sometimes it just doesn't happen. We don't become that couple. Or sometimes we just become that couple on our second try instead of our first.

Our Gospel today is one of those "bite the bullet" texts. It would be so easy to skip over to the warm and fuzzy final four verses of Jesus blessing the children—although the disciples probably were as scandalized by a man paying attention to children as the Pharisees were about Jesus' other actions. But the whole text needs to be tackled. Pain caused by misappropriations of the text needs to be eased. Certainly, Jesus has hard words to say to us, but they are words we need to hear in an era when temporary romance has taken over permanent commitment.

Harsh words for the Pharisees were welcome words to the Jewish woman who had no rights. Her husband could easily divorce her for being too fat or burning a meal. Then she had nothing. The family that had just paid a nice dowry to be rid of her was not so eager to see her back again. Jesus' words on divorce and remarriage were wonderfully freeing to the woman of first century Palestine.

Jesus uses the word "command." His opponents use "allow." Jesus is concerned about God's will. The questioners are concerned about their own rights. This self-centeredness, this "sclerocardia," this "hardness of heart" can destroy a marriage before it even begins. Because of our hardness of heart, there is not only divorce, but brokenness in other committed relationships between friends and family. Jesus refers back to Genesis 2—God made male and female to be joined as one. This bond was not to be broken. Divorce was inconsistent with God's will. Genesis shows that it was God's will in the beginning that women should be loved by their husbands as their equals. The truly beautiful translation of Gen 2:23 is, "Woman is for man the place in the world where he is at home."

A "no" to divorce from the beginning of a marriage is one safeguard against destruction. Jesus sees marriage as it can and should be—a call to fidelity, peace and love. But sometimes marriage doesn't work. Sometimes it is destructive to stay in a marriage. At that point, we are to deal with each other with grace and compassion. Jesus had a harsh word for the Pharisees, but to those asking the same question but knowing their need of forgiveness, be puts a loving hand on their shoulders and says, "God loves you; God forgives your brokenness." There are more chances, including some wonderful remarriages.

Even when we're "happily" married, our relationships with spouse and family are less than God intended. Let us pray that we can ever keep God in the center of our marriages and that we can always be humble enough to ask forgiveness from one another.
LLS

Twenty-First Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 23 October 12, 1997

Psalm 90:12-17
Amos 5:6-7, 10-15
Hebrews 4:12-16
Mark 10:17-31

First Reading

The evidence of Jesus' concern for the helpless and inconsequential continues in the story of the rich man whom Jesus loved.

In sharp contrast to the oracle from Amos, Jesus does not berate the rich man, nor accuse him of injustice or oppression. Quite the opposite in fact; Mark states that Jesus loved him. Jesus does not dispute the suppliant's claim of faithful adherence to the commandments. It is all the more interesting, then, to note Jesus' advice: if he gives all he owns to benefit the poor, he will have treasure in heaven. Sacrifice for the poor is considered by heaven's standards to be treasure, which tells us something important about the character of God's sovereignty.

Great wealth, then, can be an impediment to full participation in God's sovereign rule. The possession of great riches can harden the heart to others' need and turn all attention to the preservation and care of what one already possesses. Even if such efforts are carefully limited to just and righteous methods, this pattern runs counter to the characteristic concern for the poor and helpless that we have been noting in Jesus' conduct. Thus the possession of wealth will tend to interfere with following Jesus' teaching and example.

The disciples misunderstand, and Jesus must reassure them twice. First he points out that all things are possible for God, stating that salvation is God's task, not that of mortals. Peter persists; he sounds more than a little anxious as he points out the sacrifice that the disciples have already made. When Jesus answers he speaks of brothers, sisters, mother, father and children. Mark's audience would have been reminded of the incident in 3:31-35 when Jesus said, "Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother." The richness of life as a participant in God's realm is beyond comparison with anything we may sacrifice along the way.

The inclusion of "with persecutions" in Jesus' list of the riches of life in God's realm, and the final sentence in verse 31, recall our attention to the emphasis created by the two incidents that bracket the section of narrative through which we have been reading. Jesus has not forgotten this matter. Mark is unrelenting in showing us both Jesus' gentle concern for the least ones, and the fact that Jesus' life is marked by willingness to sacrifice and to suffer in their behalf. God's realm is not about greatness or rank, it is about God's fierce and gentle care for all—even for us. PB

Pastoral Reflections

How incredibly easy to shake our heads over the rich young man—even the rich in general—and say with a certain smugness, "Didn't he know where true riches lay?" How easy to join in Amos' invective against the rich, to spout statistics about the small percentage of people in the United States hoarding all the wealth, and yet to turn around in envy and ask, "Why does my neighbor have a big house, a Mercedes *and* a BMW in the garage, and I have nothing? Why, he has never darkened the inside of a church!"

"What must I do to inherit eternal life?" the rich young man asks. He was searching for something, and he had not yet found it in the synagogue. Perhaps he could find it with Jesus. He tells Jesus he has kept the commandments since his youth, but it turns out

he has not. When Jesus tells him to give his riches away, the young man finds that he cannot. He had not kept the first commandment, "I am the Lord your God. You shall have no other gods before me."

The question is, "Who is your god? What are you willing to give up?" In our rural community, a sunny summer Sunday might be the god, especially if the wheat is on and we've had nothing but rain. "Had to get out in the fields, Pastor." And yet, only a couple generations ago, my great-grandfather would have been appalled at the idea of plowing or harvesting on a Sunday, rain or shine. "Pastor, Emily won't be at Catechism. There's a junior high basketball tournament." Substitute cheerleading tryouts, swim meets.

And what of those of us who are pastors? Three years ago, I was given the gift of a bright and beautiful child—a gift I'd almost given up hope of ever receiving. What does she hear from me? "I'm sorry, sweetie, I just don't have time right now to____." Time is my god. Sometimes being a pastor is my god. Fulfilling everyone's expectations is my god. Other gods keep me from spending spiritual and devotional time with my true God.

We also may say we do not exploit the poor as did the Israelites in Amos' day. What of our attitude toward them? When the person in front of us in the grocery hands over food stamps to the cashier, do we surreptitiously glance over the items in the cart? Potato chips? Steak? Why, these people eat better than I do! Shame on us! What images fill our minds when we hear the word "welfare"? Many counties have programs to teach those in poverty how to shop with nutrition in mind, how to manage money more practically (are we any more practical with our use of credit cards?), how to parent more effectively. Our attitudes can be our gods. That woman whom you are appraising with a critical eye may know her need of God better than you do.

Why does the Lutheran church grow in Africa and Asia, plateau here, diminish in western Europe? We have gotten too comfortable, and when we are comfortable, what need have we for God or the church? Christians in Africa, in Asia, and, before the fall of the Berlin Wall, in East Germany, were in constant danger, maybe because of color, maybe because of lack of party commitment. They took risks to worship; we can barely roll out of bed on Sunday morning. The devil is closest when things are going well, it seems.

Jesus was not against the rich, nor was Amos. Jesus had many rich friends. But the young man and the Israelites were all chained to their possessions. If we simplify our lives, we simplify out hearts. If we simplify our hearts, we have room for God there.

A camel was the largest animal the disciples had ever seen. If it was easier for this camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven, then who could be saved?

Thanks be to God for the grace that says, "With me, all things are possible." Thanks be to the cross that assures us this promise is true. LLS

Twenty-Second Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 24 October 19, 1997

Psalm 91:9-16
Isaiah 53:4-12
Hebrews 5:1-10
Mark 10:35-45

First Reading

In today's readings the motif of contention for status among the disciples receives its fullest exposition, and Jesus' clearest answer. The careful reader should note that the Gospel pericope is selected in a way that obscures an important dramatic element: the request from the sons of Zebedee follows immediately upon Jesus' final prediction of his own betrayal, suffering, death and resurrection.

This juxtaposition makes it eminently clear that the disciples do not yet understand what it means to follow one who is on the path to the cross. Even though Jesus has now predicted his own suffering three times, and explicitly exhorted the disciples that following him means following him to suffering in 8:34-35, the disciples still seek a path that will lead them to glorious thrones.

Jesus' response is to state clearly that greatness is not the same in God's realm as it is among the nations. The overarching principle of God's sovereign rule is service to the weak and helpless, so that the greatest among Jesus' followers will be the one who is servant of all. Jesus then again takes up the theme of suffering and relates it explicitly to this principle of service. The cross that Jesus will bear is not valuable because suffering is valuable, but because by accepting it he renders the greatest imaginable service to many. Jesus invites his followers to pursue the same path he himself walks.

The other readings for this Sunday will guard against any temptation to focus exclusively on the moral exhortation of the Gospel lesson. While Jesus clearly urges his disciples to imitate him, the basis for this exhortation is his own gift to us. Jesus invites us to follow a path of service because we ourselves have been served, and saved, by Jesus. The profundity of this gift cannot be sufficiently emphasized. It is this profound nature of Jesus' gift that makes such a profound claim upon our own allegiance to the principles that Jesus embodied. We will do well, then, to follow Mark's example and point urgently to Jesus' cross; the cross itself makes a claim upon us more eloquent than any we can voice. PB

Pastoral Reflections

Thelma was dying. Doctors had not been able to remove quite all of a lung tumor at Christmas, and now, in early May, it had metastasized. Her hospital room was filled with family and well-meaning, but weeping friends, and one pastor—me. Conversation seemed to float about Thelma. No one seemed to be talking right to her. Finally she summoned what breath and strength she had, sat bolt upright and gasped, "Out! All of you, out of my room! Everyone out but Pastor!"

"I've never seen a group so intent on getting on my nerves," she muttered as I drew my chair closer. "I'm afraid, Pastor, and they're not helping. Could you please read Psalm 91 to me? I have to hear Psalm 91."

Thelma had made the Lord her refuge, and yet she was human enough to have fears. I could feel her relax as I read about the angels who would bear her up, as I read about a God who is with her in trouble. She was having her hour at Gethsemane, times we all have when we pray with Jesus, "Father, let this cup pass from me." Like Jesus, we are heard, but that doesn't always mean we get

our way. Jesus reverently submitted to God's will. Submission doesn't come quite so easily to the rest of us. I read other Scripture passages to Thelma that day until she finally fell asleep. The power of God's Word gave her the courage to submit, the will to let go.

James and John had not quite learned the art of submission. Matthew tries to soften the image of the Sons of Thunder by having their mother make the request, but Mark, known for showing the disciples in all their humanness, places responsibility solely on the shoulders of James and John. The disciples aren't even listening to Jesus. He makes three Passion predictions. After the first, Peter says, "Don't say such things!" After the second, the disciples argue about which of them is the greatest. Now we've just had the third prediction, and James and John want to know who gets to sit on Jesus' right and left in his glory!

The other disciples were incensed when they found out about this conversation, but you can bet it wasn't because they were shocked at James' and John's hubris. Oh, no. They were sorry they hadn't thought to make the same request first!

"Are you able to drink my cup? To be baptized with my baptism?" "Oh, yes!" they say eagerly. The wonderful thing about reading Mark today is the knowledge that while we see these disciples, warts and all, we know that James and John *were* able to drink Jesus' cup. James, tradition has it, was the first martyr of the disciples. John lived out his life in exile. It gives us courage to know that sinners though we may be, there is always hope for redemption. But it's so hard to say to God, "Your will be done." It's so hard to be a servant, not to seek the glory.

On Easter Sunday, when we as pastors march behind our choirs, wearing our gold stoles among lilies trumpeting new life, we are doing our job. When we sit beside the Thelmas amid the darkest hours of their lives, we also are doing our job. The perfume of lilies. The stench of cancer. But where do we serve best? I've watched hospice nurses and loving wives and husbands gently bathe and without complaint change diapers of their loved ones. I've seen men look lovingly at their Alzheimer-stricken wives, knowing they were seeing the beautiful, spirited girls they had married long ago. These servants will be greatest in the kingdom of heaven. No doubt, we will be very surprised to see who sits beside Jesus in his glory.

Because the irony is, when Jesus came into his glory on the cross, who were at his right and at his left? Thieves. Insurrectionists. LLS

Reformation Sunday
October 26, 1997

Psalm 46
Jeremiah 31:31-34
Romans 3:19-28
John 8:31-36

First Reading

It is always difficult to know where to focus the attention on Reformation Sunday. In today's ecumenical climate it may be thought unwise to observe the occasion at all. Yet certainly it must be possible to remember and commemorate the genius of the Reformation without falling prey to divisive triumphalism.

One way to avoid triumphalism is to appropriate the Reformation rediscovery that it is not what human beings have done that is ultimately important, but rather what God has done. Viewed through this lens, the day's lessons provide ample substance for careful reflection. In each one there is a clear proclamation that God has done a new thing—something important.

Jeremiah foresees a day when God will do a new thing. God promises as much: a new covenant, a new heart, a fresh start. God says, "I will forgive their iniquity, and remember their sin no more." The new covenant is not like the old one that human beings could break. This one is established by God and relies only upon God's promise. God will accomplish it, not humanity.

Paul explains to the Romans that this is precisely what God has done in Christ Jesus. In Christ the righteousness of God is revealed apart from any human accomplishment. All human boasting is then excluded, for a person is justified by faith in what God has done rather than by human performance. Again, God will accomplish it, not humanity.

The Fourth Gospel emphasizes the liberating power of Christ's word. Jesus claims the status of the son in the household of God, and asserts that the freedom granted by the Son is the only lasting freedom. We may detect a subtle play of metaphor here, for the symbolic language of Jesus' Sonship is not the only symbolic language being used here. Remember that the one who says, "If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free," is the same one of whom the evangelist writes, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." "Word" is not a simple word in the Fourth Gospel. It is the word of the Word of God in which we receive truth and freedom. Again it is no human accomplishment, but a gift of God's making. PB

Pastoral Reflections

I had never had cruise control in a car before the one I have presently, now six years old. In fact, I confess to having been just a little nervous about trying it out, even after I read in my car manual just how to do it.

When the car was a month old or so, as I was going to a pastor's conference two hours away from my home, I had what was really my first chance to try out the cruise control—out from under my husband's eagle eye. And so I came to the speed I wanted, set the cruise, and off we went. I will admit that I did not care for it at first. Why? I was not in control; the car was. All I was doing was steering. I *needed* my foot on that accelerator. I needed to be in complete control.

Of course, I have since come to love it. My arthritic knee no longer bothers me on long trips, I feel more rested, and the cruise control probably has saved me from a few speeding tickets. But that small incident brought home to me how much being in control means to me. And how much I do not

like being out of control.

Justified by faith through God's grace. *Sola gratia. Solafide.* We proclaim it, but do we believe it? We are made righteous by faith apart from works. What does that mean? We are not in control. We can do nothing to receive God's grace, other than having the faith to believe in God's grace and accept it.

Each time we see an infant baptized, what a wonderful lesson in grace! We don't baptize infants as a safeguard in case they get sick and die, although we've all done our share of emergency baptisms. When we baptize infants, who are completely self-centered and unable to do good works, we show how great God's grace is. This child is justified, made righteous, given a new life, and what did he or she have to do? Nothing!

When Martin Luther read Romans 3:28, when he read that he was made righteous by faith and not by works, he was set free from years of weeping, fasting, and whipping himself. He was set free from years of despair. Then he set out to make others free, and so today we celebrate the Reformation.

Jesus also talks about freedom. "If the Son makes you free, you shall be free indeed." Freedom. What a valuable word. Freedom. What a scary word. How much easier to join a church that has a strict list of "thou shalts" and "thou shalt nots" even outside the Ten Commandments. If we know what's expected, we can put ourselves in control. But to be given freedom by our ever-surprising God is frightening.

No matter how many times we read through our Bibles, attend church, help with funeral dinners or church repairs, no matter how much tithing of time, talent and offering we do, we cannot control God's grace, God's unconditional love. And yet, James is also right when he writes that "faith without works is dead." True faith, true belief in God's love results in what Luther called "*quellende Liebe*," loosely translated "a love bubbling over." When our love bubbles over, then the hungry are fed, the sick visited, the naked clothed. And our actions free others from the bondage of self-control to become free children of God.

God's overwhelming love is not scary. It is simply amazing, as we sing in a hymn used often on Reformation Sunday. Remember God's promises, as Newton saw them in the final verse of his hymn "Amazing Grace": "The Lord has promised good to me; His Word my hope secures; He will my shield and portion be, as long as life endures." LLS

All Saints' Sunday
November 2, 1997

Psalm 24
Isaiah 25:6-9
Revelation 21:1-6a
John 11:32-44

First Reading

On the Feast of All Saints, the theme that links all three lessons is God's defeat of death and the hope of the resurrection. The verses in the first and second lessons both reflect the same hope. Isaiah promises that God will gather all peoples on the mountain, where God will swallow up death forever and wipe away the tears from all faces. John the elder hears a voice from the heavenly throne saying that God will wipe away every tear, and death will cease.

The Gospel lesson takes up the theme of tears and death to show how Jesus confronts them personally. When Jesus encounters the death of his friend, Lazarus, we see Jesus at the fulcrum point of his mission. In the Fourth Gospel this is the point at which events begin to race to their culmination in Jesus' glorification on the cross. As the reader may find by reading a bit further, this is the event that prompts the Jewish religious authorities to decide that Jesus must himself die.

As the pericope is defined, we do not hear Jesus' statement that he is the resurrection and the life; the lesson does not include the initial dialog with Martha. We begin with the arrival of Mary to join Jesus and Martha, when she immediately kneels at Jesus' feet and declares her confidence that Jesus' presence would have prevented the death of Lazarus. Mary's confidence, her tears, the grief of all the people, and the criticism by some of his delay, move Jesus deeply. He begins to weep. The paradox of Mary's confidence in Jesus combined with her tears and lack of hope that anything more can now be done defines the turning point.

Now Jesus comes to the tomb, and Martha's caution emphasizes the complete banishment of hope: Lazarus is so dead that there will now be a bad smell. Jesus is undeterred and persists, and his prayer emphasizes the contrast between his own confidence and the lack of hope surrounding him. The voice of Jesus calls Lazarus forth from the tomb.

The closing sentence provides important connections for the reader. "Unbind him and let him go," Jesus commands. Later he says that his word will make us free, that if the Son sets one free then one will be free indeed. When Jesus raises Lazarus and sets him free he foreshadows his purpose of liberating all humanity from death. In Christ we are free indeed. PB

Pastoral Reflections

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

As I write these reflections, our church bell tolls. Seventeen-year-old Taylor has taken time out from his planting to come, at six o'clock this evening, and ring the bell 72 times for Ed. Ed, who was the last person to commune me. "Pastor, the blood of Christ shed for you." Ed, who might have missed church four times in the five years I've been here. Ed, the last person I talked to in church just yesterday. He had another "groaner" of a joke to tell, and he liked to see me roll my eyes and shake my head. Young Taylor loves farming and had a great deal of respect for Ed, another man of the land. This is Taylor's gift to Ed, the ringing of the bell.

This morning, I sat in an emergency waiting room with Ed's wife and sons. Lord, where were you when Zoe Ann woke up to find Ed not snoring as she thought, but unconscious and struggling for breath? We

weren't ready for our friend Ed to die.

"Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died."

Six years ago, near midnight on a Sunday in May, my phone rang. On the other end was my home pastor, calling from my parents' house. It seems a semi had crushed a little Sunbird and its driver, my funny, loving, beautiful "little" 30-year-old brother, Craig. Where were you, Lord, when Craig became the third victim at that dangerous intersection in less than 24 hours? How I envy Mary and Martha, who received their brother again for a little while.

Of course we know that our Lord, who makes all things new, is present at these times. Ed would have been the first to tell me. He had had to believe that, because, you see, I buried his 17-year-old son, Curt, five years ago, after Curt collapsed in art class due to an undiagnosed heart ailment. Ed chose "My Faith Looks Up to Thee" for the entrance hymn that day. And the next day, Sunday, Ed was back in church. How fitting that today, Ed's family has chosen "A Mighty Fortress" for him.

Jesus was in the waiting room today, weeping with Ed's family as he wept with Mary and Martha for his dear friend Lazarus. He was on that highway, weeping for Craig even as he gathered him to himself.

Ed and Curt and Craig, and those countless others I've buried or mourned for during my lifetime, were of course both saints and sinners. They were made holy, set apart by God for a purpose. They knew they had been made righteous through the wonderful gift of Jesus' death and resurrection. Through word and action, they preached the gospel and spread the Word that made others whole and new.

On All Saints Sunday, after worship services, we will walk in procession the half mile down the road to the church cemetery. New graves will have been added since last year, even since we made the same trip on Memorial Day. On Memorial Day, we plant and dedicate young trees—new life springing in memory of the old. On this All Saints Sunday, through, those trees will prepare for their time of dormancy. Yet they still speak to us of those saints we have loved and the hope with which they lived and died.

As we gather in song and in prayer, we will rejoice in the promises of Isaiah and Revelation of the new world that is to come. No more tears or sorrow or pain! We wait for that feast of fat things and wine on the lees when we are gathered together again into one communion. On that day, God will wipe all tears from our eyes. On that day, God will say, "You are my people, and I am your God." Alleluia! LLS

Twenty-Fifth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 27 November 9, 1997

Psalm 146
1 Kings 17:8-16
Hebrews 9:24-28
Mark 12:38-44

First Reading

As we read this Sunday's Gospel lesson the conflict between Jesus and the religious authorities reaches a fever pitch. There are many controversies that lie between them, but the stark contrast between Jesus' description of the scribes and the incident of the poor widow reveals a major dynamic in the struggle.

In the pericope for the twenty-third Sunday after Pentecost, which Reformation Sunday displaces, Jesus revealed his summary of what faithful living would be: "The first [commandment] is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Mk 12:29-31, NRSV). One aspect these two commandments share is selflessness. Such perfect love for God relegates the self to second place, and reckons the neighbor equally as important as oneself.

Our pericope follows the confrontation in which Jesus says this, and Jesus is addressing the same crowd. In this context we hear Jesus' characterization of the scribes, who love the regard of others, the places of honor at public events, and who subsist at the expense of widows. Our reading begins with Jesus warning against such self-centered behavior, after he had just endorsed a standard of selfless love for God and the neighbor.

The story of the widow of Zarephath from 1 Kings has tuned our ears to hear Jesus' first reference to the scribes devouring widows' houses. This is a striking characterization of selfishness, enhanced by the story of God graciously providing for the hospitable widow that we've just heard. The reference sets up what follows: selfish scribes devour widows' houses, while a selfless widow contributes all she has to live on.

Consider, then, the narrative devices brought into play here. Mark places our story immediately following Jesus' statement of the highest law. Next he juxtaposes Jesus' condemnation of the scribes' unbridled self regard with the story of the selfless widow. Finally, he links the two juxtaposed units by including mention of widows in each, but making the widows' poverty function in strikingly different ways. These literary elements conspire to strongly emphasize Mark's point. Jesus advocates a selfless life devoted to love of God and the neighbor, even at the expense of one's own living. PB

Pastoral Reflections

I left for church each morning with a fresh white handkerchief. Tied in the corner of that handkerchief were two shiny dimes—one for Sunday school and one for church. In Sunday school, of course, my offering was no different from anyone else's . But in church, that dime looked pretty puny in comparison with all those lovely, folded dollar bills. And sometimes it made the most awful clink in the offering plate. So I loved the story of the widow and her mites. She gave all she had, two coins, of even less value than the two dimes I had.

When I think of these two wondrous widows—the widow of Zarephath and the widow with her pittance to give—I think of a story my friend Alex told during a Thankoffering service at a Presbyterian church. Alex grew up poor in the hills of

Eastern Kentucky. Children were drawn to Alex's father, a sort of Pied Piper and storyteller. But this man had a dark, abusive side when he had been drinking, and one day he ran Alex off with a shotgun. Alex ran to his minister, who placed him in a church school for orphaned children or those in difficult family situations.

During the year, barrels of clothing and tennis shoes, books and anything else the boys needed would arrive from members of a congregation on the Ohio River. One woman in particular had decided to take Alex under her wing. Whatever he needed, she would send him. Shortly after he had gone on to college, he decided he wanted to meet this woman personally and thank her. What he found was a widow who had nothing. Any money she had made went to him. Out of her poverty, she had given a chance in life to a young boy in whom she believed. And that young boy went on to help troubled and disabled youngsters.

What faith these women must have had—the widows of Zarephath, Jerusalem, and Kentucky! They loved and believed in God enough to take risks. Would we? Would we take food out of the mouths of our children to give it to a stranger who said "Trust me"? This widow trusted, and God provided daily bread for her and her son, as well as for Elijah.

It can be scary to put that tithe in the offering envelope when you can see that the bills outweigh your paycheck. And yet the widow of Jerusalem was empowered to give her all—her "all" being one-eighth of what the rabbis taught should be given to a traveling beggar from the poor box.

It was a risk for the widow of Kentucky to place all her faith in God and money on a child whose background might have indicated he had no future. And yet she gave her all and was rewarded.

Although pastors will certainly take the opportunity here to preach stewardship sermons, there is another aspect to these pericopes, especially the Gospel, and that is sin. If not for the sin of Ahab and Jezebel, there would have been no drought, Elijah would not have had to flee, the widow and her son might not have been destitute. And some feel that Jesus was not so much praising the widow at the temple as he was furious with the scribes who, under a mask of holiness, devoured the savings of widows—a dishonor to God and to one's neighbor. The Hebrew Scriptures called on them to defend the widow, the orphan and the sojourner, but they used their power to destroy those they were to defend. They assaulted the rights of the marginalized. It was easy to take advantage of widows.

Perhaps it would behoove us all to remember the words of Ps 146:7: "The Lord lifts up those who are bowed down." These widows and those others who fall between the cracks of our society today have the hope of knowing that the banquet they will share with Christ will cost them nothing. LLS

Twenty-Sixth Sunday after Pentecost: Proper 28 November 16, 1997

Psalm 16
Daniel 12:1-3
Hebrews 10:11-14 [15-18] 19-25
Mark 13:1-8

First Reading

On this penultimate Sunday of our calendar we read the introduction to Mark's "little apocalypse." Even as the Gospel has consistently emphasized that following Jesus means embarking on the way of the cross, of service and suffering, so now Jesus warns that faithful living as we await his return means enduring many pains. What we endure is but the beginning of the birthpangs of a new age.

Jesus is addressing only Peter, James, John, and Andrew; this is not a public announcement. What Jesus says assumes that he will no longer be present with them to protect them from being led astray. "Many will come in my name and say, 'I am he!'" implies that Jesus will not himself be present to contradict the pretenders. Thus, even though the disciples have consistently failed to understand Jesus' predictions of his own death and resurrection, Jesus here offers instruction for the time after his departure while they await his return.

The situation Jesus describes is daunting. Even before the private conference Jesus observes that the great buildings of Herod's temple complex will be utterly destroyed. When the four of the inner circle later ask when this will be, Jesus' reply indicates that the faithful will face this challenge after his departure, and that even more dire circumstances will soon follow. Wars, famines, natural disasters and other calamities are but the beginning.

Jesus' reply also envisions a particular danger for his followers. Many will proclaim a message that contradicts Jesus, inviting the faithful to follow on a path that avoids suffering. Perhaps Jesus has in mind teachers who proclaim an escape from worldly trouble in one form or another, a message that promises to remove those who receive it from the troubles to come. Jesus' warning is not specific; he merely says "Beware." If we remember the consistent emphasis of Mark's Gospel throughout, though, perhaps we may infer the danger to which Jesus alludes. Jesus proclaims a gospel that leads us on a difficult path of service, suffering and sacrifice, following one who pursues the same path out of deep concern for even the least of all. Any proclamation that offers another path, avoiding the difficult way, is suspect. The words of Jesus apply also to our own day: "Beware!" PB

Pastoral Reflections

As I write, the story of 39 people who allowed themselves to be drugged and suffocated is still fresh in the news. These intelligent, computer-literate people believed that their destiny was to meet a UFO at the tail of the Hale-Bopp Comet. The same comet that my husband, my daughter and I went out to view with wonder and pleasure had been the trigger for the deaths of 39 people.

This story has given rise to stories of other cults, such as the Garbage Eaters on the West Coast, who believe they are supposed to get their daily bread by foraging in dumpsters. As the millennium approaches, the end of the world is being preached to a frightened people. In my first parish, during the Persian Gulf War, church attendance rose considerably as people flocked back, wondering whether this war in the Middle East would be Armageddon. People would come off the streets, asking to be baptized. A little insurance for Eternal Life.

My catechism students also are con-

cerned, in light of violence and lapses of morality, or warring throughout the nations. "Pastor," they ask, "Does this mean the world is going to end?" So I tell them what Jesus says later in Mark 13, the "little apocalypse": "But about that day or hour no one knows, neither the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father." Yet, be alert, live each day as if it were your last.

I think of the disciples, awed by the large stones and buildings in the temple compound. Had the temple become an idol? Do our buildings become idols? Our church, built in 1912, is a beautiful country church with red bricks and high steeples, but it is not accessible to those with handicaps. It is built in such a way that an elevator would be needed to make it accessible—a ramp would be inadequate. I discovered that, years ago, a member had offered to pay for an elevator. I couldn't believe that he was turned down, so I brought accessibility up again, determining that I knew at least ten of our members who could use an elevator.

Estimates were received, and a congregational meeting was held. Although the expense was given as a reason not to make the church accessible, it was clear that those opposed were more concerned about aesthetic damage to the church. "Let's just wait until the state mandates it," they said. "We'd be glad to carry _____ into church." (The common response to that was, "I won't be carried into church until they carry me feet first in a pine box.") And yet, in the end, not one stone, not one brick of this beautiful church will be left upon another. Jesus was right. Forty years later, the temple was destroyed. It was beautiful, but it was temporary. When will we look beyond these things to what is eternal?

It has been a year for great earthquakes, for terrible tornadoes such as those in Arkansas, for the worst flooding Ohio, Kentucky, Minnesota and the Dakotas have seen in decades, even centuries. There are wars and rumors of wars. These are the beginning of birthpangs, Jesus says. This is not a time to stockpile canned goods in an underground shelter, to give up everything to live on a mountain and wait for God, to eat garbage, to hitch ourselves to the tail of Hale-Bopp.

It is a time to forgive and seek reconciliation. It is a time to reach out in love to our neighbor. It is a time to fight for our beliefs. Today is the day to bring in God's kingdom. LLS

Christ the King
November 23, 1997

Psalm 93
Daniel 7:9-10, 13-14
Revelation 1:4b-8
John 18:33-37

First Reading

The first and second lessons for this Sunday offer an interesting conjunction with the Gospel. All three portray Christ located in a seat of power. The first and second lessons tell of the heavenly court, while the Gospel tells of Christ in the court of Pilate, the Roman ruler of Judea. All three relate to the thematic identification of the day: Christ the King.

To fully appreciate the significance of this arrangement one must attend to the respective genres of the three readings. The first and second reading are both selected from apocalyptic texts. Such texts spring from an urge to resistance during periods of oppression. Daniel was written to address the situation of the Jewish people during their persecution by Antiochus IV Epiphanes, and reflects a time when the Jewish people must have wondered whether God had abandoned them—or indeed whether God was actually in control at all. Revelation encouraged the faithful during a time of severe persecution by the Romans, perhaps like that during the reign of Domitian. In both cases the faithful are encouraged to remember that the appearance of the current state of affairs is deceptive; while God's people may appear to be lost and abandoned, prey to vicious despots, the appearance does not reflect the deeper reality of God's actual rule in the world. The current troubles are but one scene in a drama that is ultimately fully in the hands of God. Both Daniel 7 and Revelation 1 depict a vision of the higher reality of God's heavenly rule, which only awaits the proper time for its complete revelation.

The scene from the Fourth Gospel, on the other hand, is not at all apocalyptic. However, it approaches the same truth from a different angle. Jesus appears to be fully in the power of the Roman ruler, Pilate. Appearances are deceptive, though, for in a more important way Jesus really is a king. The reign of Jesus is not apparent because it is not the kind of reign that acknowledges the criteria of worldly power. Nevertheless it is a real kingdom, and all who belong to the truth will acknowledge it. PB

Pastoral Reflections

"The Lord is king, he is robed in majesty; the Lord is robed, he is girded with strength."

Some have called him "Lord." He is now, indeed, robed in majesty. Some of the soldiers found a robe of purple velvet that hangs around his shoulders, blood from the deep wounds in his back soaking and staining it.

Certainly this is a king. He has been crowned, hasn't he? Some talented wit twisted thorns together and pushed it down on this king's head. Blood drips down, mingling with the salt of the man's sweat, causing more unutterable pain.

"The floods have lifted up, O Lord, the floods have lifted up their voice; the floods lift up their roaring."

A king should be accompanied by trumpet sound, instruments lifting up their roaring like the floods. And there is a roaring. "Crucify him! Crucify him!" screams the mob, egged on by the "religious" leaders. Pilate thought that by sending out their king bloody and beaten, the people would be ashamed, would reconsider. The sight of blood only increases their lust for Jesus' death.

What kind of king is this? He is humiliated, haggard. He is a scandal, a stumbling

block. What happened to change the glad acclamations these same people made five days ago? They thought they were hailing a hero come to save them from Roman oppression. But that was not the kind of king Jesus was. That was not what Jesus' kingdom was all about.

We have trouble understanding the kingdom of God. We are about to enter Advent, that time when we speak about the kingdom being already here but not yet here. Is it any wonder Pilate was confused?

"What is truth?" he asks at the end of our Gospel, but he does not wait for any answer. Is it a rhetorical question, asked cynically by a tired and jaded man? Pilate was used to buying peace from the Jewish leaders and from Herod. Now, he seems to realize the price will be too high. What is truth? Can it be found anymore?

Many of our world leaders today seem to revel in glory. The hubris might lead some to stumble and fall, but for the most part, we look on them with envy. In fact, it is hard for us to take seriously any leader who might show a little humility. So how do we look on Jesus? What kind of king do we expect him to be?

In many of our churches this Sunday, mine included, we will sing such powerful, triumphant hymns as "Crown Him with Many Crowns" and "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name." That is well and good and reflects the kings we see in Daniel and in Revelation. Let's not forget, however, the cost of becoming that king. It's been a long time since Good Friday, and it's easy to forget that "sacred head, now wounded." Remember that for the writer of the Gospel of John, Jesus' enthronement was on the cross, and the Greek word for "exalted" is the same as for "lifted up."

Sometimes we think we deserve all good things and great blessings because we've been faithful to God. We don't want to hear about the cross. Our Good Friday services are poorly attended because no one wants to be "depressed." How can we claim the glory of Easter without first going to the cross? How can we expect the kingdom of God to come in all its glory when we shirk our responsibilities to help bring in that very kingdom? Servanthood is not a popular word today.

Our paraments and vestments today may bear the symbol of a gold diadem, but never forget the crown of thorns. Let us shed all pride so we may be able to listen for Christ's voice and know, finally, what truth is. LLS

Thanksgiving Day
November 27, 1997 U.S.A.

Psalm 126
Joel 2:21-27
1 Timothy 2:1-7
Matthew 6:25-33

First Reading

The Gospel for this Thanksgiving presents the comprehensive totality of God's provision for humanity. The new Revised Common Lectionary includes three complete sets of lessons for Thanksgiving observance. The emphasis in this Gospel lesson shifts from the previous lectionary's focus on the diverse responses of the ten lepers; we turn our attention from the human response to the overwhelming nature of God's gift.

The pericope does include exhortation. In fact, it begins with Jesus exhorting his hearers not to worry. The basis of this exhortation follows in depth: all the needs to which we are subject in life are well known to God, and God supplies them even to the birds of the air, the grass of the field. Worrying about such things provides no added benefit; it is God who accomplishes what we need.

Jesus then shifts the emphasis and urges an important realignment of human effort: "But strive first for the kingdom of God and God's righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." This advice needs careful unpacking, for the words "righteousness" and "kingdom" carry nuances that are not immediately apparent. As most Bible students will know, the kingdom (βασιλεία) of God does not refer to a location, but rather to an activity of God. The word kingdom refers to the sovereign rule of God, not necessarily to those things which God rules.

"Righteousness" (δικαιοσύνη) in Matthew displays connotations that differ in important ways from some other New Testament usages. In Matthew's Gospel, the quality of righteousness is a quality of relationship. It is not primarily a legal attribute that one achieves by life in accordance with certain precepts and laws, it has to do rather with fulfilling obligations derived from one's relation to others, with being a responsible and responsive member of one's community. The most important relationship in Matthew's view is one's relation to God, so that righteousness over against God has to do with living appropriately in God's presence—and especially with fulfilling God's will. It is in this light that Jesus says to John the Baptist, "It is proper for us in this way to fulfill all righteousness."

The startling implication of this discourse is that this righteousness is also a gift provided by God. When we place top priority on our effort to seek and follow God's will, to take our place within God's sovereign rule, we find that our place is God's gift to us. When we discover that gift we also discover that all our other needs are known and supplied in the economy of God's gracious and providential rule. PB

Pastoral Reflections

My first sermon in my first parish happened to fall on Thanksgiving Eve. The parsonage was undergoing renovation at the time. I had a toilet (for which I was most thankful!), but the only running water was in the bathtub. Kitchen counters were still on order. I was using a toaster oven for baking. The walls had not yet been repainted and repapered, and the wallpaper in my room was a ghastly green with orange flowers.

Strangely, I remember that time as one of the happiest in my life. I was newly ordained. Within weeks I would be newly engaged. The house, despite its flaws, was beautiful and spacious. My parishioners

were friendly and gracious. As I sat in the laundromat watching the first snowfall that Thanksgiving Eve afternoon, I was brimming with thankfulness. I had no worries about tomorrow. I looked forward to each day.

The next Thanksgiving Eve was different. Although I was still happy in the parish, the honeymoon was over. A couple had left a few weeks before, upset by a sermon I preached (on loving your neighbor as yourself!). For the first time in my life, I was in charge of Thanksgiving dinner. That was always my mother's realm. What did I know about turkeys? Not only that, but I had chosen to make pumpkin pies from scratch, and I had to get rooms ready to house my parents, my brother, my mother-in-law and my brother-in-law. After services, I worried myself into a frenzy of cooking and cleaning. I even cleaned the oven! The night before Thanksgiving! Was not life more than food? And wouldn't these people have something to eat, even if the turkey never thawed? But the turkey turned out just right, and the pies were delicious, and I had never had anything to worry about.

It seems as if we waste so much energy wondering what we will eat or drink or wear, wondering if people like or don't like us; wondering if we'll have a job tomorrow; planning our days in detail.

I like order. I like to plan my days. God has challenged that aspect of my personality in my two callings—first as journalist, now as pastor. At 6 a.m. the phone rings. A parishioner who has had a problem pregnancy has just given birth to twins—at 24 weeks' gestation. As I'm writing a sermon, the phone rings. A teenager was involved in a head-on collision and has been taken by helicopter to the regional trauma center. During morning devotions, a woman walks in, crying. She has decided to divorce her husband.

At these times, none of us has time to worry about tomorrow. We are trying to trust God to lead us through each minute of each day. We are hoping there is a tomorrow. We are coping the best we can. Often tomorrow does bring Thanksgiving. The twins turn one, and we celebrate with a public recognition of their baptism. Now they can be marked in oil with the cross of Christ, given their baptismal candles, presented to the brothers and sisters who prayed so faithfully for their survival. The teenager, whose chances for survival seem slim the day of the crash, on the morrow surprises us by opening his eyes and saying, "Hi, you guys!" The couple on the verge of divorce decide to seek professional counseling and find ways to love one another again. Even when the outcome is more tragic, however, I thank God for providing people to be present in our deepest needs and for knowing what's in our hearts when our moans are too deep for words.

I spent my youth worrying about my height, and here I am, still five-foot-one. That worrying didn't add an inch. This Thanksgiving, instead of worrying, I will give thanks that we have family to cook and clean for, that we're healthy, that we're breathing. And I will remind myself of the words of Angelo Roncalli, known better as Pope John the 23rd: "Who is in charge of the world, you or God? Very well, then. Sleep, Angelo." LLS

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